

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF  
MINISTRY IN THE AUSTRALIAN CHURCH UNION  
NEGOTIATIONS 1957-1971**

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The Development of the Understanding of Ministry  
in the Australian Church Union Negotiations,  
1957 - 1971

by

Andrew Fergus Dutney



I certify that Andrew Fergus Dutney has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution of the University Court, 1967, No.1 (as amended), and is qualified to submit this thesis in application for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signature of Supervisor

I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance 350 (General No.12) on 1st October, 1982 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. under Resolution of the University Court, 1967, No.1 (as amended) on 1st October, 1982.

The following thesis is based on the results of research carried out by myself, is my own composition, and has not previously been presented for a higher degree. The research was carried out in the University of St. Andrews under the supervision of Rev. Steven G. Mackie.

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## Abstract

Barely three years after the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia, the Assembly Standing Committee urged the Commission on Doctrine to 'give first priority to matters relating to ministry'. This urgent request was made in spite of the fact that questions concerning the understanding and ordering of ministry had been given close consideration during the twenty years of negotiation prior to union.

In this paper we investigate the notion of 'ministry' as it was expressed in the Basis of Union, the foundation document of the UCA. A study of the development of the understanding of ministry during the period between the setting up of the Joint Commission on Church Union (1957) and the publication of their finally revised Basis of Union (1971) is required in order to substantiate the exposition of this understanding in the Basis. Accordingly, six aspects of the development are discussed.

(i) An account is given of the evolution, during the decades prior to 1957, of the new perception of the ecumenical task in Australia with which the Commission began their work and which conditioned their development of an understanding of ministry.

(ii) A detailed review and analysis of the Commission's two Reports (1959 and 1963) is conducted.

(iii) The Commission's understanding is set in its wider context through a discussion of the convergence of missiological and ecclesiological thought between the Whitby Meeting of the IMC and the Mexico Conference of the DWME.

(iv) The reception of the Commission's proposals is evaluated through a study of surviving published responses.

(v) The Australian 'ecclesiastical climate' in the late sixties is assessed, and a theological response to that 'climate' is identified, as conditioning the Commission's revision of their proposals.

(vi) The revised Basis of Union is analysed in detail.

In conclusion, four characteristic emphases of the Basis are identified as determinative of the understanding of ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia.

### Abbreviations

ACC	:	Australian Council of Churches
CSI	:	Church of South India
DWME	:	(Commission on, and) Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches
EACC	:	East Asia Christian Conference
IMC	:	International Missionary Council
LMS	:	London Missionary Society
NMCA	:	National Missionary Council of Australia
WCC	:	World Council of Churches
WSCF	:	World's Student Christian Federation
YMCA/YWCA	:	Young Men's/Women's Christian Association



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## Introduction

On the 22nd of June, 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia was inaugurated. In this coming together of Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches,<sup>1</sup> the third largest denomination in Australia was formed.<sup>2</sup> Naturally enough, the services of inauguration, held by the Assembly and by Synods and Presbyteries throughout the nation, were occasions to celebrate the successful culmination of years of ecumenical endeavour. The formation of the Uniting Church in Australia represented a realization of hope, and the completion of a massive task. But those services were marked especially by a genuine sense of inauguration, of initiation, of beginning afresh the journey which had brought the uniting churches this far. To borrow Norman Goodall's analogy,<sup>3</sup> the formation of the Uniting Church was a milestone, not a terminus. Thus, services of inauguration became occasions both of celebration and of re-dedication:

'To costly witness in the world, to exploratory ministries, not in cautious places of easy retreat, but at the busy intersections of life, whatever our role may be; we dedicate ourselves, O God.'<sup>4</sup>

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1. 90% of Congregationalists, 90% of Methodists, and 70% of Presbyterians entered into union. D. B. Barrett (ed.), World Christian Encyclopedia - A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD1900-2000, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, Oxford and New York, 1982, p.157.
  2. In mid-1980 it was estimated that Australians were affiliated to the three largest denominations in the following proportions : Church of England in Australia, 3,775,628; Catholic Church in Australia, 3,035,201; Uniting Church in Australia, 1,194,088. Ibid., pp.155f.
  3. N. Goodall (ed.), Missions Under the Cross, published for the IMC by Edinburgh House Press, London, 1953, pp.9ff.
  4. From the NSW Synod Celebration of the Inauguration of the UCA, June 1977; in N. C. Crowe (ed.), New Beginnings in Prayer, The Australian Prayer Fellowship Handbook 1978, the Commission for World Mission of the UCA, Sydney, 1977, p.36.

In this study we seek to develop an appreciation of the vision which gave form to the Uniting Church in Australia. We investigate the dominant theological themes which emerged and were pursued in the Australian church union negotiations. Initiated in 1957, these negotiations culminated with the publication of the Basis of Union in 1971. Our special interest is in the development of the understanding of ministry.

It is not an arbitrary interest which focuses on the development of the understanding of ministry. The notion of 'ministry' was central to the conception of the Uniting Church which emerged during the Australian negotiations. This is reflected in the Interim Constitution of the UCA:

'Recognizing that ministry is a function of the whole Church to which all baptized persons are called, provision shall be made by Congregations, Parishes, Presbyteries, and Synods, for the development and exercise of the gifts of all Members. Provision shall also be made by the Assembly for the selection, education, training, and setting apart of persons for forms of ministry specified by the Assembly.'<sup>1</sup>

'Ministry' came to be seen as a concern of the whole church - in all its members, and at every level of its organized life. Clearly, an elucidation of what was meant by 'ministry' is called for.

But equally, the development of the understanding of ministry may not be scrutinized in isolation from the thematic complex which emerged in the negotiations. As we shall see, the Australian negotiations were

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1. Regulations and Interim Constitution, Including the Basis of Union - The Uniting Church in Australia, Revised 1979, Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, 1979, p.22.

characterized by a continuing pre-occupation with mission. In accordance with this missionary orientation the several themes which dominated discussions were thoroughly integrated. As each item on the agenda for negotiation was addressed in the light of the concern for mission, an essential inter-relationship between the various themes was perceived and developed. This integration of themes became a distinctive characteristic of the final formulation of the Basis of Union. Therefore, any adequate account of the development of the understanding of ministry must give due attention to the several theological and ecclesiological questions which were addressed in the Australian negotiations.

In the first chapter we undertake a brief perusal of the historical developments in Australian ecumenical relations prior to 1957. By 1957, when the negotiations were initiated, the quest for church union in Australia had already covered more than half a century. This search for unity is interesting in itself. But more importantly, the setting up of the Joint Commission on Church Union, in 1957, marked a change of direction in Australian negotiations. We seek to identify the experiences and conditions which precipitated this change of direction. In particular, we trace the coming together of the concern for the institutional unity of the churches with a developing ecumenical concern for mission and a growing awareness of the need for the Australian churches to come to terms with their national and geographical context. As these concerns were brought together a new approach to the negotiation of church union was demanded.

The second chapter involves a detailed review and analysis of the two Reports of the Joint Commission on Church Union (1959 and 1963). In their First Report, The Faith of the Church, we recognize the

development of a new methodology in ecumenical discussions. Rather than formulating an agreed statement of what 'the faith' actually was, the Commission sought to lead the uniting churches to the sources of faith. Avoiding the cul-de-sac of comparative ecclesiology, they called on the uniting churches to go beyond a narrow confessionalism in order to become a church which confesses the faith in its own time and place. They insisted that the uniting churches would find the way into union, not by uncovering a 'lowest common denominator', but according to the 'rhythm of the Gospel'. Though their methodology is not to be explained simply in terms of the post-Lundian and post-CSI atmosphere in which the negotiations were taking place, it will be seen that the Australian commissioners were working towards a creative appropriation of the lessons learnt through the Faith and Order movement and the experience of the Church of South India. In their Second Report, The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, the Commission began to tease out the implications of their methodology. They stressed that the church is missionary, both by nature and in function. The notion of 'ministry', as a function of the whole church, the calling of its every member, and the responsibility of certain set-apart members, became central to their understanding of the missionary church. In formulating proposals for the ordering of a united church, the Commission saw itself as being bound, not by the presuppositions or immediate traditions of the uniting churches, but by the need to express and facilitate the missionary nature and function of the church. This approach had surprising results, particularly in the proposals put forward concerning the ordering of ministry. But these proposals, for all their novelty, were an expression of a new vision of the church and its mission. In discussing their Reports, and



especially their proposals, we will recognize that the Commission was working on the frontier of the ecumenical movement.

We continue this analysis in the third chapter, dealing directly with the convergence of ecclesiological and missiological thought in the wider ecumenical movement. In the development of thought between the Whitby Meeting of the IMC and the Mexico Meeting of the DWME, we are able to locate the origins of what the Joint Commission had set forth as the 'essential issues' before the uniting churches. The ex-centric approach to ecclesiology which had grown out of the missionary emphasis in ecumenical discussions, was reflected and given concrete application in the Australian proposals of 1963. By insisting that their proposals be evaluated according to the 'essential issues' arising from a missionary orientation, the Commission asked the uniting churches to take this ex-centric approach in reaching their decision on union. The question was not to be, Are these proposals the easiest and least traumatizing means to unite?, but, Do these proposals offer the most effective means to respond to our call to mission? In the second section of this chapter, we discuss the responses in the uniting churches to the 'essential issues' and to the proposals in which they were embodied. The majority of published responses concentrated on the proposals concerning the ordering of ministry. Arresting in their novelty, and challenging in their vision, the proposals concerning ministry evoked vigorous debate and discussion in the uniting churches. The understanding of ministry which had been developed by the Commission was further refined through the discussion in the churches, and their proposals concerning ministry were to require revision.

Our fourth chapter concerns the Basis of Union as it was finally formulated in 1971. Recognizing that the response to the earlier

proposals does not sufficiently account for the extensive revision of the Proposed Basis of 1963, we look more widely for an explanation. We first seek to assess the changes in the general 'ecclesiastical climate' which occurred during the sixties in Australia. We identify a 'crisis' which was developing in the church, and particularly in the understanding and exercise of ministry. Experiencing a loss of social significance, a questioning of traditional expressions of Christian belief, and increasingly frequent conflict between the expectations which ministers and congregations had of one another, the Australian churches found themselves facing an uncertain future. But a theological response to this 'crisis' was emerging, and we find it to be reflected in the revision of the Proposed Basis. In the second section of the chapter we undertake a review and analysis of the revised Basis of Union. Although we concentrate on those paragraphs dealing directly with ministry, each paragraph of the Basis is treated in turn. In the Basis of Union there is no isolation of the subject of ministry from, for example, the unity of the church, doctrinal standards, the sacraments or church government. But the statements concerning ministry must be seen in the context of a thematically concordant whole. It is in eighteen paragraphs, not two, that the Basis of Union sets forth the understanding of ministry.

In concluding this study we identify four characteristic emphases in the Basis of Union : the recognition of the priority of the message of Christ, the acceptance of a membership gifted for ministry, the acknowledgement of the necessity of the ministry of the Word, and the call and provision for collegiality and conciliarity in the missionary church. In discussing these four characteristic emphases, we describe the understanding of ministry which was developed for the Uniting Church in Australia.

## Chapter One

### A Brief History of Ecumenical Relations in Australia, to 1957

- (i) Introduction
- (ii) An overview of nineteenth century church relations in Australia
- (iii) Church union negotiations, 1901-1924 : The ideal of a 'United Evangelical Church of Australia'
- (iv) A missionary basis for unity, 1896-1948
- (v) Tripartite negotiations, 1938-1957
- (vi) New direction, 1957

(i) Introduction

In 1957 the General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and the Executive Council of the Congregational Union of Australia and New Zealand set up the Joint Commission on Church Union. The Commission was to consist of twenty one members, seven from each denomination. By the time it had completed its task of formulating a Basis of Union which was acceptable to the uniting churches, in 1971, forty eight individuals had taken their place on the Commission, the numbers having been increased by retirements and new appointments and by the presence of proxies at certain meetings. The Commission also sought the assistance of 'consultants', four of whom are named in the Second Report, to assist with certain aspects of their work. Two such consultants were co-opted on the Drafting Committee.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission was responsible for the preparation of a Basis of Union for the organic union of the three denominations, and its Reports, The Faith of the Church (1959) and The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering (1963), are vitally instructive for this study.

Before considering the work of this Commission, however, it is necessary that we consider the historical background of Australian negotiations for church union. This consideration has significance, in the first place, because the work of this Commission was by no means the first serious attempt to devise a scheme of union which involved these three churches. It is therefore important to determine the elements

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1. See Appendix I for details of the membership of the Commission.

which contributed to the success of this Commission after a history of failure. The formation of the Joint Commission in 1957 marked a crucial change of direction in Australian church union negotiations, and the understanding of ministry developed by this Commission cannot be adequately discussed without an appreciation of what it was that constituted the difference between this body and previous Committees and Joint Committees on Christian Unity. It is in the ecumenical task as newly perceived in 1957 that we shall find the origin of the understanding of ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia.

An historical study is warranted, in the second place, since, as shall be discussed in the second chapter of this paper, the Joint Commission was conscious of the fact that the successful fulfilment of its task required that it come to terms with historical developments, not only in the church, but also in socio-political conditions of Australia and the surrounding regions in the second half of the century. By the end of the fifties in Australia the ecumenical task was more broadly understood than as being 'simply' that of uniting divided denominations. This being so, it is appropriate that we appreciate the pertinent historical developments which conditioned their considerations.

The first two sections of this chapter consider the development of a desire for visible unity between the Australian churches, and the first steps taken towards such unity. In the following sections we trace the coming-together of this institutional concern with the development of a missionary basis for unity, and a growing ecumenical awareness of the need for the Australian churches to come to terms with their particular national and geographical context.

The reader will notice that much of the historical detail of this chapter is treated from the perspective of the Presbyterian church. This has been necessary since most of the decisions, both to initiate

and to suspend union negotiations, were taken by the Presbyterian state and federal Assemblies. Moreover, the important developments of 1957 took place essentially within the Presbyterian Committee and were accepted by the negotiating churches on the initiative of the Presbyterian General Assembly.

(ii) An Overview of Nineteenth Century Church Relationships in Australia

1901 was the year in which the separate states in Australia formally entered into a federation. It was also the year in which the separate Presbyterian state Assemblies gathered for the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. It is this year and this Assembly which we shall take as the time of the initiation of church union discussions. It is significant for our study that the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia recorded its 'sympathy with the great ideal of a United Evangelical Church of Australia', and took the concrete step of appointing a committee 'to consider the principles on which the Presbyterian Church of Australia is prepared to consider the question of a larger union'.<sup>1</sup>

It is remarkable, if not incredible, that such a gesture of magnanimity and good will could be made by the Presbyterian church, of all churches, at such an early date.<sup>2</sup> Without departing too far from the period which concerns us in this chapter, it should be observed that until at least the second half of the nineteenth century the dividedness of the church in Australia was its most impressive characteristic. No

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1. Minute 107. Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1901, p.42.
  2. F. Engel, Ecumenical Australia - Australian Christians in Conflict and Unity (1825-1926), Joint Board of Christian Education, Melbourne, 1984, provides the most recent detailed account of 'the development of creative relationships among the Churches' in the nineteenth century, and of the 'gradual emergence of an ecumenical movement in Australia' in the first decades of the twentieth century.

gentlemanly agreement on comity in these new colonies; the churches were vigorous competitors in the scramble to secure a place in the emerging society. In correspondence between Wesleyans from this era we gain some insight into this attitude:

'If we do not rush into the door which is open at Parrt (Parramatta) we may see calvinism rise to our hurt, and wait many days before we can set our foot there without great difficulty and disadvantage.'<sup>1</sup>

Even Samuel Marsden, the then Chaplain, who was possessed of a comparatively enlightened disposition concerning cooperation with non-Anglicans in the interest of missionary activity,<sup>2</sup> was found to express some disquiet at the opportunity afforded Wesleyan missionaries in the Australian colonies:

'... they are under no restrictions, they may Sing and Preach and Pray, in every place and at any time they think proper, which gives them great influence and weight in the Colony over the Establishment Clergy, and which tends to alienate the affections of the People from the Established Church and weaken our congregations.'<sup>3</sup>

But for the paradigmatic expression of this competitiveness we need look no further than the vociferous Presbyterian John Dunmore Lang, who engaged in a constant battle with the Anglicans, of whom he suspected a continuing plot to achieve a de facto establishment status in Australia,<sup>4</sup> and the Roman Catholics, of whom he assumed a seditious scheming to

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1. Lawry to Taylor, 7 September 1820, reproduced in J. Woolmington (ed.), Religion in Early Australia, Cassell Australia, 1976, p.47.
  2. Cf. J. Garrett, To Live Among the Stars, WCC Publications, 1982, pp.19 and 61.
  3. To the Bishop of London, 26 August 1821, reproduced in J. Woolmington (ed.), op. cit., p.65.
  4. Although the first Chaplains to the Australian colonies were Anglican, Australia has never had an established church.

bring the colonies under the influence of 'Popery' (of which he even accused the 'saintly' Caroline Chisholm, whose immigration plan he identified as a strategem for the encouragement of 'mixed marriages' - a 'known' artifice of papist expansionism).<sup>1</sup> The historian, Manning Clark, describes the remarkable occasion on which Lang joined with, not only the Methodists, but also the Catholics to oppose the monopoly of the Church of England on primary education which resulted from the creation of the Church and Schools Corporation in 1825, to the 'astonishment and disgust' of the establishment.<sup>2</sup> But of course such 'cooperation' was more a reflection of the dividedness of the Australian church than of any fraternal sentiment. As Hartwell observes:

'The cry of Rome quickly brought the Protestants into some sort of agreement ... As important, however, was the fear that the Church of England would establish clerical hegemony over the Australian Colonies.'<sup>3</sup>

The fiery Lang also managed to split the all too easily divided Presbyterian church by forming in 1838 the Synod of New South Wales, 'consisting of Dr. Lang and those who adhered to Him', in opposition to the Presbytery of New South Wales, the governing body recognized by the local government, on the grounds of the Presbytery's 'corruption and laxity in discipline'.<sup>4</sup>

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1. See M. Kiddle, Caroline Chisholm, Melbourne University Press, 1957, pp.83f.
  2. See M. Clark, A Short History of Australia (Revised Edition), Mentor Books, 1969, p.75; and C. M. H. Clark, A History of Australia, Vol. II, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1968, p.175.
  3. R. M. Hartwell, 'The Pastoral Ascendancy' in G. Greenwood (ed.), Australia - A Social and Political History, Angus and Robertson, 1955, p.61.
  4. See R. Gordon Balfour, Presbyterianism in the Colonies, Macniven and Wallace, Edinburgh, 1899, p.108, and J. Woolmington (ed.), op. cit., p.56, para. lll.



A succinct description of this aspect of the relationship between the churches in early Australia is to be found in the memorandum by John Mackenzie and G. H. Cranswick, Australia and the Ecumenical Movement<sup>1</sup> in which they quote Bishop Moyes of Armidale, New South Wales, a leading ecumenist during the 1940's, who observed that:

'Australia inherited the divisions that marked the church life and, as years went by, imported others from America. The individualism and competition that marked the struggle of the people infected the already divided religious life. Australia is a land of bitter jealousies and envies, not least within the Churches, a fact which has not commended our gospel to our fellows.'<sup>2</sup>

By the second half of the nineteenth century we find a merciful decline in this religious rivalry, as the social structures of the colonies began to take shape. The churches had by this stage largely secured their respective places within Australia, the sharp edge of their competitiveness being thereby removed. But coupled with this diminishment of tension was the emergence, perhaps as early as 1842, and steady growth, most pronounced between 1880 and 1900, of the federation movement in the political and economic spheres of the Australian colonies.<sup>3</sup> The attitude of 'every man for himself', so common to colonial societies where the promise of material benefit easily obscured the sense of civic duty and reduced public spirit to, at best, parochialism, was gradually replaced by a sense of patriotism and national identity. Certainly chief among the motives which finally

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1. Unpublished, held in the archives of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1951.

2. Ibid., p.3.

3. See M. Clark, A Short History of Australia, op. cit., for a brief description of this movement, pp.183-193.

clinched the success of the movement were those of national security, economic benefit and racial purity,<sup>1</sup> but nonetheless the spirit which was at work unifying the Australian people was not without effect on the divided churches. A patriotism engendered on such a basis was nonetheless a patriotism, and its call to Australians to unite could not but influence more than the organs of politics and economics.<sup>2</sup> Mackenzie and Cranswick summarize the effect of this national mood on the churches:

'As was inevitable, the same influences which constrained the separated States to federate had for many years been leavening the churches with a desire for closer fellowship and more active cooperation. The first problem for the denominations was obviously the reorganization of their unrelated assemblies and activities upon a national basis. As constitutional and legal problems were involved this proved to be no easy task. However, before the meeting of the Edinburgh Conference in 1910, practically all the Reformed Churches (i.e. "Churches of the Reformation", not only Presbyterian Churches) had created synods, assemblies, conferences and unions, some with less authority than others, but all alike seeking to unite in unbroken fellowship all the members and congregations of their own particular communions without regard to state or former ecclesiastical boundaries. When this limited objective had been attained it became possible to look further afield and to plan larger ventures of faith aiming at an incorporating union between the Reformed Churches which had either broken away from each other or had taken different roads during the divisive years of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. For a discussion of the case put in favour of federation see, e.g. M. Barnard, A History of Australia, Angus and Robertson, 1962, pp.441-452.
  2. For a contemporary description of the 'Union Movement' in the Presbyterian church see R. Gordon Balfour, op. cit., pp.114-118.
  3. Op. cit., p.4.

(iii) Church Union Negotiations 1901-1924 : The Ideal of a 'United Evangelical Church of Australia'

The first stage of church union negotiations in Australia, beginning in 1901, was above all marked by what, with hindsight, seems like a rather naive optimism.<sup>1</sup> Flushed with the success of the reunion and federation movements in the various churches, the national bodies set about, with almost juvenile gait, the task of church union. Without wishing to undervalue the unquestionably strenuous and serious efforts of the negotiators of the churches, their enterprise was bound to fail in that it was based largely on a national infatuation with the idea of unity which proved to be, as is so often the case with such a sentiment, short lived.

After the initial overture of the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia responses were offered by several churches, indicating both a general interest in the idea and, in the nature of the replies, the directions in which negotiations might prove most fruitful. In a report on the 1903 General Assembly we read:

'The Assembly was chiefly notable, perhaps, for its Forward Movement in the matter of Federation with non-Presbyterian Churches, such as the Methodists and Congregationalists. The number of points of doctrine and religious belief on which all these Churches were agreed was a surprise, but still, there are rocks ahead. The Baptist brethren for instance are not disposed to surrender their opposition to infant baptism, suggesting in lieu of such, a Dedicatory service, with baptism in adult years. The difficulties as respects the Congregational Churches are considerable, and it will need

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1. Manning Clark calls the period of Australian history between 1901 and 1919 the 'age of the optimists', and this found an expression in the church as well. A Short History of Australia, op. cit., pp.192ff.

all the wisdom of our Australian brethren to discover a modus vivendi with such. Altogether, it would appear as if affinities were more numerous with the Methodist Churches than with either of the others, while the Anglican Church contented itself with sending friendly greetings to the Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

Following this 'testing of the water', negotiations were initiated between the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in 1905 with a view to church union. This negotiation was the task of a Joint Committee of the three churches. Discussions and friendly overtures also began to take place between the Presbyterian and Anglican churches with a view to closer cooperation. These contacts soon brought to light, what we may now see as the fact that to a great extent the talk of union was premature. The proverbial 'Australian friendliness', in the churches at least, did not extend to old rivals, and there was no real depth of ecumenical commitment outside that which existed among the majority (the bare majority, as we shall see) of the Federal courts.

Initially there were hopeful signs with regard to both the tripartite negotiations and the bipartite conversations. Concerning the latter particularly, the reporter writing for The Quarterly Register in 1907 seemed quite elated by events at the General Assembly the previous year:

'Australia is surely the land of "new things" whatever Solomon may have said, for at this Presbyterian Assembly, a letter of Greeting from the Archbishop of Sydney and Primate of all Australia and Tasmania was read, expressing the hope that

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1. The Quarterly Register, London, Vol. VII, No.1, February 1904, p.252. The 'Report of the Committee on Federation of Protestant Churches, 1903', may be found in Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1903, pp.100ff.

its deliberations and work might be abundantly blessed for the good of their Church and the welfare of Australia ... The Australians might teach their English brethren a lesson in good manners and in Christian fraternity. We presume that a general good feeling must exist among all the Churches accounting for a proposal, which was before the Assembly, of "a Hymn Book for all the Sunday Schools of Protestant Churches in Australia".<sup>1</sup>

As the tripartite negotiations proceeded and began to reach the stage of drawing some conclusions regarding a doctrinal basis for a future scheme of union, the Anglican church intimated a growing interest in a closer relationship with the Presbyterian church. A conference held in 1907 between these two churches marked the beginning of a second set of negotiations. Seven points of doctrinal agreement were reached,<sup>2</sup> but, predictably, the impasse of the fourth point of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, concerning the Historic Episcopate, was necessarily acknowledged. But optimism reigned supreme at this time, and so it could be said:

'Should there be a dead lock at this stage, it is thought probable that there may be some method of getting round the difficulty, so that without any sacrifice by either Church, Organic Union may yet be secured.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. Vol. VIII, No.1, February, 1907, pp.17f. The reference to England related to the reaction to a letter of Greeting from the local Free Church Council to a Church Congress in Barrow 'on which the High Church papers asked very superciliously - "What business had they to do such a thing? Who wanted them?"'. The proposals for the Hymn Book were abandoned in 1907, and such an enterprise was not successfully completed until 1977 with the publication of The Australian Hymnbook which includes a 'Catholic Supplement' (Collins).
  2. See The Quarterly Register, Vol. VIII, No.2, May 1907, p.40.
  3. Ibid.

By the time of the next Presbyterian General Assembly, however, negotiations were directed towards federal union only, instead of organic union.

The 'well mannered' and fraternal activities of the Australian churches were early the cause of some disquiet in the 'old country'. The editors of The Quarterly Register felt constrained to sound a note of warning on developments in the Presbyterian negotiations with the Congregational and Methodist churches. A Basis of Polity prepared by the Joint Committee of the three churches was a matter of concern in that 'presbyter, presbytery and presbyterian are to be heard of no more' since the new church was proposed to consist of a Parish Council, corresponding to a session, a District Council, corresponding to a presbytery, a Provincial Council, corresponding to a synod or State Assembly, and a General Council, corresponding to a General Assembly. Moreover, ministers were to have limited tenure of office in a particular congregation - five years in a self-sustaining congregation with the possibility of extension according to the vote of the membership and with the approval of the Provincial Council.<sup>1</sup>

By 1908 there were clear signs that the ecumenical optimism in Australia was under stress. Obviously concerned at reports from Britain indicating the impression there that Australian Presbyterians were about to cast aside their historic connections, not only in the sensible matter of union with the Congregationalists and Methodists but also in their rather eccentric courtship with the Anglicans, Rev. W. M. M. Alexander, a leading Victorian Presbyterian, reported that:

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1. Vol. VIII, No.1, February 1907, pp.18f and No.3, August 1907, p.65.

'... in each Church there are leading men, clerical and lay, who are utterly opposed to incorporation. On the other hand, there is a growing Christian sentiment that there should be a practical co-operation that will abate, if not abolish the evil of overlapping in older districts, and promote effective Evangelization of remoter and more sparsely-settled districts, where rival denominations are hurtful and not helpful. Finally, it is certain that a large part of the Presbyterian Church will not agree to be cut off from glorious memories of our historic Church, and who fear that a great universal Australian Church would not be for the best interests of liberty and progress in our young nation.'<sup>1</sup>

In the Assembly of the Presbyterian church in Victoria that year the Moderator, in his address on 'Some developments that make for and against Union', again indicated that the negotiations were not as assured of success as was at first thought. He identified the fact that theological study, in its breaching of the traditional denominational walls, was beginning to draw Christians 'unconsciously' together and to eliminate 'secondary items' from the Confessions which divided the church. But he further observed that there was 'an emotional type of religious life and a contemplative one', and that both of these needed to be blended if a union was to be achieved. He suggested that while there was undoubted progress in the latter 'type', the former remained as divisive as ever.<sup>2</sup>

The negotiations with the Anglican church were terminated in 1912 since it was considered futile to pursue them until such time as the Anglican church had gained such autonomy as to make talk of union, even

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1. The Quarterly Register, Vol. VIII, No.8, November 1908, p.187.

2. See The Quarterly Register, Vol. VIII, No.9, February 1909, p.211.

federal union, practicable.<sup>1</sup> But aside from these legal difficulties, it was realised that there was a growing opposition lobby in both churches which seemed to indicate that such a union would create sufficient disunity and dissent as to negate its value.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence of the dissatisfaction of many Presbyterians with talk of union most clearly emerged in the Assemblies of 1912 and 1914, when motions to the effect that negotiations should cease were only narrowly defeated. In the latter Assembly the motion which authorized the Joint Committee to send their proposals to the lower courts and congregations of the three denominations was only carried by the Moderator's casting vote.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the second decade of this century the Joint Committee continued its work of amending and improving the Basis of Union, but always against the background of a growing, and vocal opposition. In 1918 the Basis was put to a membership vote in each of the three churches, the result being favourable in each case (Methodist 90%, Congregational 84% and Presbyterian 60% in favour of the Basis). After further amendments, completed in 1921, the Presbyterian General Assembly of 1922 approved the Basis and resolved to send it on to the State Assemblies and thereafter to the presbyteries, sessions and congregations. This process was not completed, however, since, after three State Assemblies

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1. Minute 84 of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1912. This autonomy was not gained by the Anglican church until 1962.
  2. Cf. The Quarterly Register, Vol. IX, No.10, May 1912, p.511.
  3. See J. F. Peter, Church Union in Australia - A Guide to the Proposals, The Methodist Publishing House (Aldersgate Press), 1964, p.10.



had expressed their disapproval of the Basis, it was decided to await the decision of the next General Assembly.

Probably the most important debate on the Basis of Union was that conducted in the Victorian Presbyterian church. Professor Adam, the Convener of the General Assembly's Committee, was as tireless in rallying support for union in his own state as he was in pursuing his Committee duties. But by all reports he and his supporters were no match for the opposition led by Laurence Rentoul. In the crucial Victorian Assembly in May 1923, a motion of the Rev. John Mackenzie approving union on the Revised Basis was countered by Dr. Rentoul's amendment calling on the Assembly to treat both union and the Basis 'as fit for the outer dark and that alone'.

'The old man tossed the years and all his burdens from his shoulders that night like feathers. It was a typical exhibition in every way. He fascinated the reporters at the table, as he always did. One there wrote a vivid article on the debate for the following Saturday's issue of his paper, in which he described with gusto the Moderator's vain efforts to impress on Dr. Rentoul that his time was exhausted, and how, driven at last from the platform, the Doctor retired to his seat still speaking, still gesticulating.'<sup>1</sup>

In the final vote Rentoul's amendment was carried by 148 to 140. There could be no question of pursuing the matter of union without the support of that strong and vital arm of the Presbyterian Church of Australia that existed in Victoria.

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1. A. Macdonald, One Hundred Years of Presbyterianism in Victoria, The Centenary History issued by Authority of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, Robertson and Mullens Ltd., Melbourne, 1937, p.155. A vivid account of these union negotiations is given in this volume, pp.149-156.

The General Assembly, in 1924, carried two important resolutions.

The first expressed its continuing conviction that:

'... the communion of fellow Christians in worship and service is a duty wherever it is not forbidden by conscience ...'

and went on to affirm its belief that:

'... so far as is revealed in these negotiations there is no bar in principle to union between the three negotiating churches ...'

But the second resolution effectively brought negotiations to an end in having the Assembly:

'... recognize the evidence of such a divided state of feeling and opinion among office-bearers and people of the Presbyterian Church of Australia ... as to make it inadvisable at present to press forward to organic union ... on this Basis, and resolve rather to await the time when under the leading of Divine Providence a way may be opened up whereby these and other divisions of Christ's one Church may be happily healed in accordance with His Will.'<sup>1</sup>

It is tempting to recall the Victorian Moderator's analysis of 1908 where he distinguished between a 'contemplative' and an 'emotional type' of religious life, both having bearing on the future of church union. The above resolutions seem to support his analysis in affirming that there is no principle militating against union (the 'contemplative' grounds), but recognising that the division in 'feeling and opinion' in the church (the 'emotional' grounds) necessitates counsel against union.

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1. Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1924, Minute 95, pp.49f. Cf. J. F. Peter, op. cit.

The warming flush of magnanimity and fraternal sentiment that marked the turn of Australia's first century and spilled into its second, climaxing in 1901, was appreciably on the ebb by the second decade of the 1900's. By 1919 it had been replaced with that impulse which causes individuals and groups to cling to the sense of identity and security which is afforded in the protection of the status quo, rather than to seek some ill-defined, though potentially 'better', state which is promised by visionaries.<sup>1</sup>

This national shift of sentiment is reflected in the changing fortunes of the movement towards church union between 1901 and 1924. It is problematic to relate this movement in Australia to the ecumenical movement in Britain and North America during the same period, although they certainly parallel.<sup>2</sup> In Australia, the origin of an ecumenical

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1. Manning Clark identifies 1919, and particularly the speech of the then Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, on Australia's post-war position, as the point which marks the close of the 'age of the optimists' and the beginning of the 'age of survivors'. See A Short History of Australia, *op. cit.*, p.215.
  2. Church union initiatives in Canada were followed with great interest by the negotiating churches in Australia during this period. But Canadian activities were primarily of influence only in so far as the Basis of Union prepared by the Joint Committee at points closely followed the Canadian scheme. There was, for example, no emulation of the Canadian 'truce' (1917-1921) which sought to bring the minority Presbyterian opposition into line with the majority; an exercise with questionable success admittedly. A motion proposing a delay of five years in negotiations was defeated in the General Assembly of 1922. See A. Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p.152. It is interesting to speculate as to whether the fact that negotiations were initiated and largely led by the Methodists in Canada, a body with a greater evangelical and missionary history than the Presbyterians, was a contributing factor to the success of the Canadian scheme which was so closely paralleled by the Australian negotiations in almost every other respect. For a brief account of the Canadian union see R. Rouse and S. C. Neill (eds.), A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948, S.P.C.K., 1954, pp.454-458.

sentiment was more directly related to the 'national mood' than in other parts of the world. The first stirrings of ecumenism in South India towards the end of this period were of course also related to national considerations, but this was accompanied by missionary considerations which were not so obvious a component in the Australian movement even though they were included among the pragmatic points which favoured an Australian union.<sup>1</sup> Similarly the decline of this sentiment, though related to the experience of the first world war, had more to do with the progressive moderation of the 'infatuation' which briefly existed between rival groups in the new nation. The separated churches sought a 'marriage' on the basis of a sentiment that could at most support a 'romance'.

It is probably better not to describe the union negotiations between 1901 and 1924 as an expression of the 'ecumenical movement' at all. Even though these negotiations were important for later ecumenical activity in terms of developing a better understanding of the essential agreement and disagreements between the churches, their main significance lies in their role in preparing the ground for the growth of the ecumenical movement. The ideal of a 'United Evangelical Church of Australia' had its origin more in the nuances attending the word 'Australia' at the turn of the century than in a certain understanding

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1. Evangelical considerations were certainly primary for some proponents of union, but division was generally seen as more of an impediment to utilization of resources than a 'scandal' to the Gospel.

of 'Church'<sup>1</sup> or 'Evangelical'.

(iv) A Missionary Basis for Unity 1896-1948

Although the negotiations we have described are best seen as other than an expression of the world wide ecumenical movement, it is nonetheless possible to identify an emerging ecumenical movement, at points organically related to the movement in the rest of the world, during this period. Running beside and beneath the mainstream of the churches' life was the growing ecumenical conviction of the missionary movement in Australia.

The influence of J. R. Mott, and of the WSCF, the YMCA and YWCA, the Student Volunteer Movement, and the IMC, on whose behalf he spoke during his Australian visits of 1896, 1903 and 1926, was by no means slight in facilitating the emergence of the ecumenical movement in Australia.

According to C. H. Hopkins, Mott's success on his first tour was largely because of his ability to perceive and harness the emergent nationalism in Australia during the nineties. The movement towards

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1. It should be recognized that this is not true of the discussions at the Reunion Conferences of 1922 and 1923 between the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches of Australia. These discussions were preliminary and explorative only, directed towards closer cooperation at federal and state levels as a preliminary to union. At the second Conference, in May 1922 at Cronulla, the first subject discussed was 'The Nature of the Church and its Bearing Upon Unity'. The agreed statement on this subject explicitly affirmed that visible church unity is a corollary of the understanding of the nature of the church. See G. K. A. Bell (ed.), Documents on Christian Unity 1920-30, Oxford University Press, 1930, pp.217-227. Cf., Australia and Reunion - The Lambeth Appeal, Report of the Reunion Conference - Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Australia, Angus and Robertson Ltd., Sydney, 1922.

national unity was not unfamiliar to Mott, due to his experience in North America, and was neither unwelcome in that it produced energies which could be directed, by a speaker of Mott's calibre, towards evangelical and missionary concern.

'Mott's familiarity with Canada prepared him to endorse the federation idea, and doubtless the youth who responded enthusiastically to his call for an intercolonial student union affiliated with the WSCF were motivated by nationalistic and universalistic ideals.'<sup>1</sup>

Mott himself wrote in a letter of the 29th of July 1896 that 'Wherever we went, the students responded most heartily to the idea of uniting in a national movement of their own'.<sup>2</sup>

The 1896 tour saw Mott founding new student Christian Unions in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Ballarat. The geographic isolation of these centres meant that students worked with almost no knowledge of the activities of their counterparts in other universities. One of the chief accomplishments of that tour therefore was the organization of the Australasian Student Christian Union to facilitate cooperation and fellowship between the scattered Unions.<sup>3</sup> Here we see the seed of the ecumenical movement planted, primarily in the interests of mission and evangelism, in the Australian universities and colleges. Mott himself wrote at that time:

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1. C. H. Hopkins, John R. Mott 1865-1955, World Council of Churches, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, p.157.
  2. J. R. Mott, Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott - Vol. II The World's Student Christian Federation, Association Press, New York, 1947, p.268.
  3. See C. H. Hopkins, op. cit., pp.160f and 169f.

'What of the meaning and possibilities of the Australasian Student Christian Union? ... It means the union in spirit and practical effort of the coming leaders of the different divisions of the all-embracing Church of Christ - a union which will be carried beyond college walls.'<sup>1</sup>

The Unions flourished and expanded in the following years, as did the concern for mission and evangelism on which they were based, such that on his 1903 tour it was the case that:

'Nowhere did Mott need to "struggle for a hearing" by students, as had been the case in 1896. The five with which he had begun on the first trip were now forty-five, and the seventy members he had found in 1896 were now 1,370. His first meetings at Sydney and at Melbourne were each larger than all his opening audiences put together seven years earlier.'<sup>2</sup>

The mobilization of Christian students and the gathering of such students together on an interdenominational basis in Unions and in a federal Union linked to the world wide movement, was certainly an important building block of the coming ecumenical movement in Australia. It was probably of less immediate significance in Australia than in other parts of the world because of the marginal position given to religion by Australian society generally, and particularly in education which was organized on an explicitly secular basis.<sup>3</sup> But by the end of the twenties, when these students had begun to take leading roles in

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1. J. R. Mott, op. cit., pp.270f.

2. C. H. Hopkins, op. cit., p.270.

3. Mott was quite struck by the secularity of Australian universities which was a more prominent feature there than anywhere else in his experiences of universities throughout the world. See J. R. Mott, op. cit., p.263.

the churches, the importance of this movement became obvious. The vitality of this relatively small movement and its growing influence on the churches is well illustrated in a paragraph from the Report presented at the Seventh International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement at Kansas City in 1914. In 1896 the Student Volunteer Movement of Australasia was organized as a wing of the Australasian Student Christian Union.

'The Student Volunteer Movement of Australasia is one of the most promising in the world. Although its student field is not extensive, it has up to the present time enrolled between 300 and 400 volunteers of whom 106 have already sailed. Last year more new volunteers were enrolled than in any preceeding year. There is growing interest in missionary study, there being a total enrollment last year of 734. Largely under the influence of this Movement, the Layman's Missionary Movement was introduced into Australasia. The two organizations work in the closest possible co-operation and actually join in deputation work in the churches. The Volunteer Movement of Australasia is doing more than any other in the world to promote the missionary spirit in the churches of the country. Its activity is a splendid illustration of how a comparatively small company of earnest students can impress the spirit and policy of the Church throughout the entire nation.'<sup>1</sup>

By the time of Mott's third tour of Australia, in 1926, the church had been well primed - through its experiences of the Student Christian movements, negotiations for church union and cooperation, the 1910 conference at Edinburgh at which it was well represented and on the continuation committee of which it was represented, and subsequently the internationally influential IMC - to join the world wide ecumenical movement and give it expression in

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1. J. R. Mott, Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott, Vol. I The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, Association Press, New York, 1946, p.154.



its own country. Mott's personal presence may not have been necessary to make 1926 a turning point for the Australian church, but it certainly clinched the inevitable coming together of missionary and ecumenical concerns. Hopkins describes the high regard in which Mott was held at that time, and also indicates how his audience had considerably broadened since his first visit some thirty years previous.

'As in 1896 and 1903, he was welcomed into this still vaguely Edwardian society with equivalent pomp and circumstance, not only by mayors, governors, bishops and archbishops, but by university students, the clergy, the missionary community, and large audiences of church and YMCA orientation.'<sup>1</sup>

This visit was the occasion of two important missionary conferences held in Melbourne during April of that year. The first brought together representatives of virtually all the missionary bodies of the Protestant churches. The second also included representatives of the student Unions and of the YMCA and YWCA. The consideration of Australia's actual and potential missionary role at these conferences, under the able leadership of Mott, stimulated the already considerable missionary concern. Interestingly, in presenting the Jerusalem proposal of the IMC, and in attempting to gauge opinion on mission in general, Mott also took the opportunity to attack the 'White Australia' policy on the grounds that 'The Christian spirit is necessarily missionary and inclusive, and cannot be content to let any barriers permanently remain between man and man.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. C. H. Hopkins, op. cit., p.654.

2. J. R. Mott, Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott, Vol. V The International Missionary Council, Association Press, New York, 1947, p.610. See this volume also for the full text of that address 'The Race Problem' pp.608-620, and for the findings of the Melbourne missionary conference that April on 'The Australian Aborigines' pp.407f.

Of most interest for this paper is that at the first of the April conferences it was proposed that a National Missionary Council of Australia be established. The continuation committee of that conference accomplished this in 1927 by considerably revising the constitution of the United Missionary Council which had been formed in 1920 to promote cooperation in mission.<sup>1</sup> The deliberations and activities of the NMCA were to be important not only in promoting closer cooperation and formulating agreed policies with regard to mission, but also in highlighting the need and bringing to light the missionary basis for church union.

Among the more obvious contributions of the NMCA to the ecumenical movement in Australia was the process of discussion which followed the National Missionary Conference of Australia in Sydney, in April 1937, which resulted in the well known Australian Proposals for Intercommunion. In this case the concern for church unity stemmed directly from a prior concern for mission.

At the 1937 conference the difficulties caused by denominational division were the subject for discussion. Generally speaking comity of missions was duly observed by all the non-Roman denominations. But this was becoming more difficult as Christians moved from the region of one denomination to that of another. In Papua, for example, Anglican missionaries had begun to follow Anglican Christians into territory assigned to Congregationals. According to John Garrett:

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1. See W. R. Hogg, Ecumenical Foundations, A History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth-Century Background, Harper and Brothers, Publishers, New York, 1952, pp.214 and 238; and C. H. Hopkins, op. cit., pp.654-656.

'Papuan Anglicans, in the years after World War I, migrated to work in other parts of New Guinea. They were surprised to find themselves deprived of sacraments and pastoral care. Roman Catholics regarded them as heretical. Their own church authorities considered Protestant churches, in the majority elsewhere in New Guinea, as schismatic.'<sup>1</sup>

The conference formed the view that an arrangement needed to be made whereby it would be possible for Christians so transferred to be eligible for full fellowship in the denomination established in the region in which they found themselves. This would allow the practice of comity to continue to serve the function of maximizing the utilization of missionary resources, and improve denominational cooperation.

In spite of the good relations between the churches in the mission fields, it was observed that at the point of intercommunion this fellowship broke down. It was considered that the real obstacle to intercommunion was the divergent understandings of ministry held by the various denominations. No real solution to the problem was reached at the conference, but the idea of a United Church in the Pacific was mooted, and a Committee was set up to investigate the question.

'There came a vision of a United Church in the Pacific, for it was felt that, whatever reasons might be advanced for denominational separateness at the Home Base, none could consistently be given for such a lack of unity among the infant Churches of the South Seas.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p.251.
  2. J. W. Burton in G. K. A. Bell (ed.), Documents on Christian Unity, Third Series 1930-1948, Oxford University Press, 1948, p.204. It was not until 1956 that the United Church of North Australia was inaugurated (a Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational union) which included two congregations, mostly expatriate, in Port Moresby. And in 1962 these joined with the Papua Ekalesia (formed from the work of the LMS) and the Methodists to form the United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Cf. J. Garrett, op. cit., pp.303f; and The Ecumenical Review, Vol. IX, 1956-1957, p.286; Vol. XII, 1959-1960, p.242.

Immediately after the conference an unofficial group, consisting of three ministers from each of the three denominations engaged in mission in Papua - Anglican, Methodist and Congregationalist - met to discuss informally the situation in Papua which had precipitated the concern for intercommunion. According to J. W. Burton, the chairman of the NMCA and a participant in these discussions:

'As time went on we discovered that we could not limit our enquiries and discussions to any particular mission field, for there were practical difficulties in the way while the Churches at home remained apart. Hence it was borne in upon us that we must face the whole question of intercommunion as it presents itself both at home and abroad.'<sup>1</sup>

With the invitation to certain Presbyterian ministers to join the group, the four largest non-Roman denominations were again studying, albeit unofficially, the possibility of a closer relationship. The invitation was further extended to ministers of any denomination who wished to participate, and it was resolved to make provision for ministers of any communion who wished to avail themselves of the privilege of intercommunion which it was hoped would eventuate. The group pursued its work for three years. Eventually the authoritative bodies of the Anglican, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches appointed representatives to the group, though without committing themselves to the acceptance of any particular conclusions which might be reached. It was this group which produced the Australian Proposals for Intercommunion.

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1. G. K. A. Bell (ed.), op. cit., p.205.

The aim of the Proposals, finally formulated in October 1943, was not to unite the churches (not to create a United Church in the Pacific, nor at home), nor even to unite ministries, but simply to extend the authority of ministries so that they could be accepted by other denominations.

The first suggestion as to the form of the Proposals was that there should be 'a general interchange of ministerial commissions', effected by each denomination giving its commission to ministers of the others in and by the form used at the ordination of its own ministers. Thus, for example, a Presbyterian minister would submit to a commission by the Anglican Church in the form used for episcopal ordination, and an Anglican minister in the form used for presbyterial ordination. This was rejected, since it seemed to imply re-ordination. It had its supporters, however, notably G. K. A. Bell, the British ecumenist, who held that this Proposal would supply precisely what was lacking in existing ministries and preventing intercommunion, namely, episcopal commissioning in the case of non-episcopal ministries and presbyterial or congregational commissioning in the case of episcopal ministries. He saw no belittling of previous commissions in this.<sup>1</sup>

The Proposals, as finally formulated, provided for a procedure whereby a single formula for commissioning was used in all cases. The rubrics governing this formula stipulated that wherever the Proposals were put into effect the laying on of hands and prescribed prayer were to be performed and said by a group consisting of at least two appointed ministers of each participating communion and that no minister

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1. See G. K. A. Bell, Christian Unity, Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1948, pp.141-145.

should submit to the procedure more than once. The procedure was intended to provide for the 'lawful invitation to officiate temporarily' in any participating communion.<sup>1</sup>

The high expectations of the group for the acceptance of their Proposals were disappointed when, in 1948, the Lambeth Conference proved less than enthusiastic in their approval of the scheme. The fear was expressed that such a 'half-way house' might fail to provide assistance to the larger goal of organic union by seemingly providing all that was needed for denominational cooperation and unity.

'In spite of the disadvantages attaching to such schemes, which are noted in the Report of the Committee on Unity, the Conference is not prepared to discourage further explorations along this line, if they are linked with provisions for the growing together of the Churches concerned and with the definite acceptance of organic union as their final goal.'<sup>2</sup>

The Australian Proposals for Intercommunion were both 'too much' and 'too little' at once. They were too much in that they assumed the ability of denominations to accept the ministrations of each other 'without doubt or scruple to any' without having provided any sufficient answer to the questions which kept 'friendly' and 'cooperative' communions in separation. They were 'too little' in the same matter; by regarding as 'entirely secondary' the variant theological views held

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1. For details of the Proposal including Preface, Declaration, Formula, Rubrics and Notes see G. K. A. Bell (ed.), Documents on Christian Unity, Third Series 1930-1948, op. cit., pp.209-211.
  2. Lambeth Conference 1948, London, p.41. See R. Rouse and S. C. Neill (eds.), op. cit., pp.482-484 for a discussion of the Proposals.

by those involved, and by avoiding problems of polity and Church government which, they felt, 'could all be solved by intelligent and reasonable men'. Though surely not a Gordian knot, the 'bundle' of concerns for mission, doctrine and polity could not be untied if the ecumenical movement was to be fruitful in the institutional dimension of the church's life.

Through the NMCA and the discussions which led to the formulation of the Australian Proposals the ecumenical task in Australia was given a basis not only in the concern for drawing together the divided churches, but also in the pursuit of this goal out of a concern for mission. It is as we see these two elements coming together, as early as the twenties, that we can properly speak of an Australian 'ecumenical movement'.

(v) Tripartite Negotiations 1938-1957

The unsuccessful conclusion of the tripartite negotiations in 1924 did not bring church union discussions to a complete end. A brief process of conference on the basis of the 1920 Lambeth Conference 'Appeal to All Christian People' involved the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian churches in 1922 and 1923. These talks were terminated after the Presbyterian General Assembly resolved that 'Conferences can only be as between Churches meeting on equal terms', and interpreted the Anglican suggestion as to reordination as a contradiction of this principle. The Methodists and Congregationalists

concurred on this point with the Presbyterians.<sup>1</sup>

The 1918 vote, though demonstrating a divided opinion in the Presbyterian church, had equally demonstrated that significant and sufficient majorities in the Methodist and Congregational churches favoured union. At the Biennial Assembly of the Congregational church in 1933 it was resolved to revive negotiations with the Methodist church. After an unofficial conference in 1935, a Joint Committee of the two churches was set up and given authorization to prepare proposals for a bipartite union. In the introductory recommendations of the report a decision reached in 1932 at an unofficial conference of Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, that 'a simple statement of faith rather than the elaborate one of 1921 would lead to greater unanimity, and the polity already prepared would need little amendment', was reiterated. Though expressing the view that the bipartite union was a first and important step, the Joint Statement affirmed that the ultimate objective remained that of union with the Presbyterian and other churches.<sup>2</sup>

The desire to eliminate competition between the missionary societies of the two bodies, the LMS and the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, was as much in evidence as the desire to eventually unite with the Presbyterian church in the negotiations. In 1938

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1. See H. P. Douglass, A Decade of Objective Progress in Church Unity 1927-1936, Report No.4 of Commission IV of the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order, Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1937, p.42; G. K. A. Bell (ed.), Documents on Christian Unity 1920-30, Oxford University Press, 1930, pp.217-229; J. Mackenzie and G. H. Cranswick, op. cit.
  2. See H. P. Douglass, op. cit., pp.41-45.



progress towards the immediate union was halted when the Presbyterian church proposed that a tripartite union on a federal, rather than an organic, basis might be examined as a possible step towards unity.<sup>1</sup>

A joint conference of the three denominations, in December 1942, produced proposals for a federal Union. These recommended the establishment of Departmental Boards, administered by State or Regional Councils and coordinated by an Australian Council, to deal with whatever activities the three denominations were willing to hand over. This procedure was designed to avoid the necessity of validating Acts of Parliaments and those 'difficult, controversial questions concerned with doctrine, polity and property'.<sup>2</sup>

In 1945 and 1946 the national courts of the three churches gave their approval to the proposals. During 1947 they were generally approved by all the state courts of the Methodist and Congregational churches, but were variably received by the Presbyterian State Assemblies.<sup>3</sup> The Joint Committee therefore suspended its negotiations while awaiting the decision of the Presbyterian General Assembly of 1948. That Assembly resolved to agree 'to enter into federation with the Methodist and Congregational Churches on terms to be agreed upon by the three Churches, and affirming federal Union as a step towards corporate union with the Congregational and Methodist Churches'. It was further decided to conduct a Referendum of members before the 1951

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1. See J. Mackenzie and G. H. Cranswick, *op. cit.*, 'Note on Methodist-Congregational Negotiations for Church Union', (page unnumbered).
  2. 'Report Upon Federal Union' printed in full in the 'Blue Book' of the Presbyterian General Assembly, 1948, pp.162-166. See J. F. Peter, *op. cit.*, p.11.
  3. See 'Report Upon Federal Union', *ibid.*, p.166.

General Assembly.<sup>1</sup> This never took place, however, since it could not be decided how to present the issue to members and, equally importantly, due to the untimely death of the Church's Law Agent.<sup>2</sup>

Thus when the General Assembly met in 1951 it had to report its regret to the other denominations that it had delayed so long in finalizing its decision, and that 'owing to the lack of a clear decision on the matter' it felt constrained to discontinue the negotiations. But more than this, the Assembly, 'whilst recognizing the desirability of the maximum degree of co-operation in matters of common concern with all other evangelical Churches', went on to declare:

'... that there is urgent need for the Presbyterian Church of Australia to close its ranks, to avoid the unnecessary dissipation of energy by internal controversy, and, by vigour of our Church extension work, the improved efficiency of our Presbyterian government, and the proclamation of the Christian Gospel with our distinctive theological emphasis, to make our full and proper contribution to the Church catholic.'

The resolution further expressed the view that the 'best and greatest contribution to the ecumenical Church' that the Australian Presbyterians could make was in strengthening their ties with other Presbyterian churches and through its active membership in the World Presbyterian Alliance.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Minute 274.

2. Cf. J. F. Peter, op. cit., p.12.

3. See J. Mackenzie and G. H. Cranswick, op. cit., 'The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia and Christian Unity (1951)', (pages unnumbered).

In 1924 this inability of the Presbyterian church to see its way clear to continue negotiations caused a delay of almost a decade before its partners in discussions resumed their planning, and of almost twenty years before the Presbyterians themselves joined the talks. But in 1951, even though the breakdown in negotiations was of a generally similar nature, and although that Assembly seemed to be even less enthusiastic about an imminent union than its 1924 counterpart, there was in fact no long-term disruption of talks.

At the very next General Assembly, in 1954, the matter was raised again. The Assembly resolved to complete the task it had set itself in 1948, and directed the State Assemblies, Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and Congregations to vote on the desirability of resuming negotiations with the Methodist and Congregational churches.<sup>1</sup> The result of the voting, which took place in 1955, showed an unexpected shift towards an ecumenical consensus when compared with the 1918 vote and the mood of the 1951 Assembly. In State Assemblies 70%, in Presbyteries 73%, in Kirk Sessions 81%, and among Communicants 75% voted in favour of the resumption of negotiations. The Executive of the Presbyterian Committee on Christian Unity was therefore free to comply with the direction of the General Assembly that in the case of an affirmative vote it was to confer with the corresponding Committees of the other two denominations with a view to preparing a possible Basis of Union to be presented to the next Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Minute 82, p.26.

2. Ibid. See J. F. Peter, op. cit., p.13.

J. F. Peter suggests that a factor which may have influenced the 1954 General Assembly in its unexpected resumption of activity towards union was the expression of the opinion of the Queensland State Assembly, in May of that year, that the time was ripe 'for the re-opening of negotiations with a view to ultimate union', and its request that the General Assembly 'take appropriate steps towards this end'.<sup>1</sup> While admitting that this was a secondary consideration for the General Assembly that met the following September, and indeed for the Queensland Assembly itself, he argues that it had a more primary significance in that it apparently influenced the Methodist General Conference, which also met in Brisbane at about the same time that year, in its agreement to issue the joint appeal to the Presbyterian church.

The Methodist and Congregational churches were determined to go ahead with their plans for union, but for as long as there were grounds for hope they were equally determined to make this a union which included the Presbyterian church. For as much as the tripartite schemes had been frustrated by the difficulties of the Presbyterian church, the bipartite proposals were also interrupted with each sign of renewed interest by that denomination. The resolution of the 1954 Queensland Assembly seems to have been taken as just such a sign. By preempting the response of the General Assembly to the request of the Queensland Assembly, the Methodist and Congregational churches were able to elicit the decision necessary for the resumption of negotiations earlier than seemed likely.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Minute 81.5, p.36.

2. Cf. A. H. Wood, The Uniting Church of Australia, The Methodist Publishing House (Aldersgate Press), Melbourne et al., 1961, p.14.

There is evidence of a new determination emerging in the fifties to bring discussions, which by now had been conducted over half a century, to a successful conclusion. It was in 1957 that this determination was most clearly to the fore, and indeed produced the necessary creative energies to identify a new line of approach which was more likely to produce a successful and more satisfying resolution of the negotiations which had been repeatedly frustrated.

The Conveners of the three Committees drew up a draft Basis of Union which was sent to other Committee members for suggested improvements. These were considered by the Executive and then by the Conveners in another conference. Thus it was possible to present a Proposed Basis of Union to the Presbyterian General Assembly in September 1957.<sup>1</sup>

The Proposed Basis of Union had its critics of course, but most significantly, there was a division of opinion within the Presbyterian Committee on Christian Unity itself. The leading spokesman for the opposition was J. D. McCaughey, a Presbyterian from Belfast who had arrived in Australia in 1953 to take the post of Professor of New Testament Studies at Ormond College in Melbourne. McCaughey commanded great respect in the ecumenical movement. Between 1941 and 1944 he had a war-time appointment with the YMCA. In 1946 he was the Secretary of the British Council of Churches Commission on Atomic Energy. Between 1946 and 1951 he was the Study Secretary of the SCM of Great Britain and Ireland. In 1952 he was on the Editorial Staff of the SCM Press. In 1951 he had collaborated with M. M. Thomas in writing the influential 'Grey Book' for the WSCF, The Christian in the World

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1. Cf. J. F. Peter, op. cit., p.13. The Proposed Basis of Union may be found in Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1957, pp.92-101.

Struggle . J. D. McCaughey brought to the Australian ecumenical movement of the fifties, not only a growing international reputation and respect, but also an expertise born of wide experience in the movement. It has been said that the ecumenical activities in Australia were 'amateurish' until the time of his involvement. This may be an ambiguous and exaggerated term, but without doubt the stimulus provided by McCaughey, and particularly the argument which he raised against the Proposed Basis of Union, was crucial to the sudden change of direction taken in church union negotiations in Australia in 1957.

(vi) New Direction 1957

An important change of direction took place in church union negotiations in 1957 and the years that followed. This cannot be explained as simply a by-product of experience gained through discussions between 1901 and 1957. The negotiations subsequent to 1957 were in a sense not a continuation of previous talks. The learning that resulted from earlier negotiations, both through achievement and failure, was only one conditioning factor which led the churches to undertake a new initiative in the interests of realizing their desire for unity.

We have already seen how the twenties were the decade in which several strands of concern and activity were being drawn together into something which could properly be called an ecumenical movement. This movement in Australia was closely related to the world wide ecumenical movement. It was in 1927 that the IMC found its Australian counterpart in the NMCA. In 1934 the first steps were taken to establish an

organ of the Faith and Order Movement in Australia.

Responding to a letter from the Secretary, Canon Hodgson, two Australian members of the Continuation Committee of Faith and Order, G. H. Cranswick and A. E. Holden, convened a preliminary meeting in Melbourne to organize Australian preparations for the forthcoming conference in Edinburgh in 1937. This meeting resolved to create in Victoria a Regional Committee of the Faith and Order Movement. The Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches were represented on the Committee. When, at Oxford and Edinburgh in 1937 and at Utrecht in 1938, it was decided to establish a World Council of Churches, the Victorian Committee responded by reorganizing itself in 1942 as the Victorian Regional Committee of the World Council of Churches. In addition to the four denominations mentioned, the Baptists, Churches of Christ and Salvation Army became members of the Regional Committee. This development, and the vigorous extension of the Committee's work in promoting 'the growth of Ecumenical consciousness in the members of all Churches',<sup>1</sup> prompted similar interest in other states so that in 1946 the Australian Council for the World Council of Churches was organized.<sup>2</sup>

Through the Victorian Committee, and later the Australian Council, the Australian ecumenical movement became open to the influence of developments within the movement in the rest of the world. The sense of urgency of the international movement was heightened by

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1. Constitution of the Regional Committee of Victoria, 2(2).
  2. See J. Mackenzie and G. H. Cranswick, *op. cit.*, pp.4-11; R. Rouse and S. C. Neill (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp.625f; cf. The Ecumenical Review, Vol.VI, 1954, pp.311f.

the trauma of the Second World War. Whereas the 'Great War' had been a blow which momentarily staggered the movement, the Second World War had, if anything, fortified the resolve of ecumenists and invigorated their endeavour. According to Visser 't Hooft:

'Instead of a period of stagnation the war proved to be a time of deepening and intensifying ecumenical fellowship ... The struggle to be the Church - essentially one and the same struggle in many countries - the common defence against the ideological attack on the Church Universal, the common suffering, the opportunity to serve prisoners of war and refugees from other nations - these proved more powerful factors in building ecumenical conviction than conferences, committees, or journeys.'<sup>1</sup>

Even before the end of the war church leaders were convinced that their role in the post-war world would include their participation in the process of the restoration and reformation of church and society. Not only had the movement become even more vital, its new energy was being directed towards increasingly more specific goals for the church and the world.<sup>2</sup>

'Thus the war years, which might so easily have brought about the total disruption and destruction of the ecumenical movement as it had grown up in the 1920's and 1930's, had in fact given it more substance.'<sup>3</sup>

It was the Victorian Committee, acting on behalf of the whole of Australia, that responded to the invitation of the Federal Council of the Churches in America by sending the Bishop of Armidale, Dr. Moyes,

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1. R. Rouse and S. C. Neill, op. cit., p.709.
  2. Cf. ibid., pp.710-712 and 716.
  3. Visser 't Hooft, ibid., p.712.



and the then Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Dr. Macauley, to the conference held in Princeton in 1943 to study the 'Basis of a just and durable peace'. On their return to Australia their call for cooperation and unity among the denominations, to be expressed in a national council of churches, was based on the need for the church to speak effectively to the Australian nation as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Added to the basis of the call to Christian unity, which by this time included the practical concern for the better utilization of resources and the concern for more effective mission and evangelism, was the new awareness of the social and political responsibility of the Australian churches - an awareness made keen by the trauma and tragedy of the Second World War.

This perception of the Australian ecumenical task was further informed by the new awareness of the geographical placement of their nation and the responsibility thereby imposed. This awareness had been forcibly and finally precipitated by the war in Asia and the Pacific. The relationship with the Pacific peoples was not a new realization since most Australians live on the eastern, Pacific, coast; and the Maoris of nearby New Zealand are themselves a Polynesian people; and the churches had long been involved in missionary activity in the Pacific through their societies, concern for such enterprise having been heightened through the NMCA. But the awareness of Australia as being, in some sense, an Asian country was new.

The fall of Singapore and the bombing of Darwin and Broome by the Japanese in February 1942, the engagement of Australian troops on

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1. J. Mackenzie and G. H. Cranswick, op. cit., p.5.

Asian soil, and the consciousness of the atrophy of the European presence in what was still known as the 'Far East' made Australians aware of the true nature of their 'neighbourhood' and their natural relationship to the 'Near North'.

'Asia was suddenly very near and Great Britain very far away. Immediately after the war some Australasian church leaders, especially John Garret (sic) and Victor Coombes, discerned the necessary future Asian-Australasian church relationship and began to press for truly fraternal contacts.'<sup>1</sup>

H. L. Perkins, then the General Secretary of the Australian Council of Churches, described in 1964 the events which fostered the emergence of this geographical awakening.

'Much of the younger church leadership today received its first experience of Asia during the war. (I am one of them.) It was men returning from the war who first began to say to fellow-Australians "you must take notice of the thousand-million people to the North of you". This was largely said in a strategic context ... Since the war we have had a continual flow of Asian students into Australia and these students have had a tremendous influence in making us aware of Asian peoples in ceasing to regard them as strange beings from some other planet, as it were ... it was the Independence Movement in Indonesia, firmly supported by Dr. Evatt in the Labour Government then in power in Australia, which moved us to make our initiatives towards that country.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Hans-Ruedi Weber, Asia and the Ecumenical Movement 1895-1961, SCM Press Ltd., 1966, pp.287f.
  2. From an unpublished letter to Rev. Hans-Ruedi Weber, 31st January, 1964, held in the archives of the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland.

Perkins went on to indicate the influence of 'the great event of the CSI' (the Church of South India) and of the independence of Asian churches on the consciousness of the Australian churches.

The issue of the relationship between Australian and Asian churches came to a head in 1957 at the East Asia Christian Conference in Prapat, Indonesia, where the Australian and New Zealander observers present were moved from the observer section to the member section. By unanimous vote it was decided to give them the same rights as other representatives.<sup>1</sup> The invitation to join the EACC demonstrated the Asian awareness of the relationship to Australia and posed the question 'Is it not so?' to the awakening Australian churches.

But as well as the influence of this new awareness of a socio-political and geographical responsibility on ecumenism in Australia, the ecumenical movement of the fifties found itself needing to come to terms with an historical environment known as 'a secularized Western World'. Again the realization of the need to take account of this must be seen as a result of Australia's involvement in the world-wide ecumenical movement. For nearly a century Australia had been, broadly speaking, a 'secularized' country. But it was as the British, European and American churches began to face secularism in their own countries that Australian churchmen were awakened to the same responsibility which had long been theirs.

In preparation for the third World Conference on Faith and Order at Lund, a Report was issued in 1951 by the Theological Commission

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1. Hans-Ruedi Weber, op. cit., pp.286f.

appointed in 1938 by the Continuation Committee of Faith and Order. In this report is a description of one of the 'new factors' involved in the ecumenical enterprise:

'We find ourselves to-day living in what is virtually a new world compared with that of a couple of generations ago ... we cannot fail to realise that, since the dawn of this century, great changes have taken place in our political, economic and cultural life ... These things have created new pressures ... which have to be reckoned with and which present a distinct challenge to the Christian communities scattered throughout the world. The divided Churches often find themselves faced with a total secular ideology which, in their divided state, they find difficult to resist and overcome.'<sup>1</sup>

But even at this time the idea of 'resistance' to the secular world was giving way to a more positive understanding of the church's relationship to the new environment. In 1951 M. M. Thomas and Davis McCaughey collaborated to write a WSCF 'Grey Book' entitled The Christian in the World Struggle .<sup>2</sup> In dealing with the question of revolution we find this positive understanding emerging:

'First, since the revolution points to a righteousness which God wills for men but which is not yet openly revealed, the Christian says "yes" to the revolution. Secondly, the Christian is aware that in every dynamic revolution demonic forces are released : he therefore says "no" to these evil forces of the spirit ... But we must all learn to say "yes" and "no" for no other reason than that we see in current events the hand of God, in mercy and judgement.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. Faith and Order Report, The Church, SCM Press Ltd., 1951, pp.30f.
  2. Interestingly a 'Study Outline' by Harvey Perkins, a leading Australian ecumenist mentioned above, was appended in the original edition.
  3. M. M. Thomas and J. D. McCaughey, The Christian in the World Struggle, A Grey Book of the World's Student Christian Federation, Geneva, 1951, pp.49f.

The understanding being expressed here belonged more to the post-colonial, in particular Asian, church than to the west. But it was this view that was gaining increasing credence in the Australian ecumenical movement and filtering through to the churches. In 1958 this found expression at a conference held at Rangoon in preparation for the world 'teaching conference' of the WSCF at Strasbourg in 1960. As young Asians caught the vision of the 'new world' promised them in the social revolution following the close of the colonial era, new questions were raised for the church. McCaughey wrote:

'Rangoon marked an important step away from high biblicalism or high churchmanship into a high view of God's dealings with the world : high worldmanship.'<sup>1</sup>

In a very real sense the questions which had been dealt with by successive Committees and Joint Committees on Christian Unity were of a mechanical nature : how to devise a mutually acceptable scheme for reorganizing separated denominations into some form of union. Even doctrinal questions were treated as problems of drawing together the strands which had diverged from one another in previous centuries. The Proposed Basis of Union presented to the Presbyterian General Assembly was no exception. Heavily based on the Canadian scheme of the 1920's, it offered a mechanical solution to the problem of union. But given the tremendous changes which had taken place in the consciousness of ecumenists and churchmen in post-war Australia, it is not difficult to see why this was unsatisfactory. The ecumenical problem was

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1. H. E. Fey (ed.), The Ecumenical Advance - A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Vol. 2, 1948-1968, S.P.C.K., 1970, p.400.

no longer, if indeed it ever had been, simply the dividedness of the church. The problem of the ecumenical movement in the fifties in Australia was that of a divided church seeking to respond to the call to mission and service in a socially metamorphose, suddenly 'Asian', and secular Australia. There was no question of union as a cosmetic exercise. Whatever was to happen to the church in the following years, it had to be such as to fit the church for its calling in the new Australia.

When the Executive of the Presbyterian Committee on Christian Unity sent the Basis of Union to Committee members prior to the Assembly, some argued that it was rendered unsuitable by its failure to distinguish between basic principles and administrative details and that the former was the prior question for a scheme of union. Agreement on basic principles did not simply mean the formulation of an adequate synthesis of traditional doctrinal emphases. It meant finding a sound theological basis on which to build the institutions of a 'new' church for the new Australia. The Executive responded to this with only minor amendments. When the full Committee met on the day before the opening of the Assembly, however, the numbers carried a recommendation that the Convener duly presented to the Assembly - though not without describing the circumstances under which it had been agreed to, and stating his personal opposition to it.

'That the Assembly

Express the opinion that the work of the Commission<sup>1</sup> would be facilitated if it sought to agree first on the following matters:

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1. A Joint Commission had been set up by the Assembly's agreement to the preceding Clause of the Report of the Committee.

- (a) the Church's rule of faith;
  - (b) authority and discipline in the life of the Church;
  - (c) the ministry of the Church;
- and draw the attention of its representatives to this opinion; and suggest to the Commission that when agreed statements on any or all of these topics become available they should be presented through the Christian Unity Committees to the three Federal Courts;
- (d) and that from time to time some account of the state of the Commission's decisions be provided for the information of the Lower Courts of the conferring churches.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the motion was carried under the particular circumstances points to the fact that the Assembly was dissatisfied with the line of negotiations to that time, and that the new tone of ecumenical concern was not restricted to certain members of the Committee. This was born out when the result of the ballot for the Presbyterian members of the Joint Commission was made known. Heading the list was Professor McCaughey, the prime mover in bringing forward the 'agreed statements' proposal, and the names that followed represented, almost without exception, men who were known to belong to the group of those who held an opposing view to that of the Executive, and indeed to that which had dominated negotiations since the beginning of the century.<sup>2</sup>

When the First Report of the Joint Commission on Church Union was published in 1959 it became clear that 1957 was the year in which something new in church union negotiations had been initiated. In the Introduction the Commission identified the questions with which it had

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1. See J. F. Peter, op. cit., p.15.

2. Cf. ibid., pp.15f.

been preoccupied subsequent to 1957:

'What is the Church's Faith? Where is it to be found? How can we as individuals, and the Churches from which we come, strengthen our grasp of the Faith by which we are held?'<sup>1</sup>

It would be a basic mistake to suppose that these were the quiz-like questions of a catechetical exercise. It became clear in the Reports of the Commission that its primary concern was not simply with the mechanical problem of how to achieve a merger of three institutions, but with the existential question of what it means to be the church in Australia in the second half of the twentieth century. Perhaps it was as much due to the urgency of this question as to the expertise of the Commission that the union was eventually realized. Certainly the Commission's struggle with this urgent, basic question, and indeed the uniting churches' grappling with the question under the guidance of the Commission, made an indelible mark on the character of the Uniting Church in Australia and its conception of ministry.

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1. The First Report of the Joint Commission on Church Union, The Faith of the Church, fourth printing 1978, The Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, p.11.



## Chapter Two

The Reports of the Joint Commission on  
Church Union, 1959 and 1963

Section One

The First Report of the Joint Commission  
on Church Union, The Faith of the Church (1959)

- (i) Beyond comparative ecclesiology
- (ii) Beyond confessionalism
- (iii) The time and place to confess
- (iv) The gospel 'rhythm'

(i) Beyond comparative ecclesiology

At the Third World Conference on Faith and Order, at Lund in 1952, the evening of the 17th August was devoted to consideration of 'The Task of Faith and Order in a Pilgrim Church'. In the second introductory address, 'Implications of the Ecumenical Movement', the Secretary of the Conference, O. S. Tomkins, argued that the agreement of the churches to form a World Council, to enter into a 'covenant relationship' as he described it, 'brings us to the end of what I would call a mere comparative ecclesiology'.<sup>1</sup>

Tomkins did not deny the value, or even the necessity, of the churches explaining themselves to one another; comparing each other's doctrinal and ecclesiological convictions. But he sought to show that a new task was implied in the further movement of ecumenism since 1937.<sup>2</sup> He understood the formation of the World Council of Churches, 'at the behest of the Churches', as involving a denial of the self-sufficiency of the separated bodies (the 'essence of denominationalism'), or as the acknowledgement that the churches needed each other.<sup>3</sup> A certain renunciation of the claims which denominations made for their peculiar perspectives and practices was entailed in this commitment. He considered that the formation of the World Council implied a new

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1. O. S. Tomkins (ed.), The Third World Conference on Faith and Order, SCM Press, London, 1953, p.165.

2. In 1937 the Oxford Conference on Life and Work and the Edinburgh Conference on Faith and Order endorsed the conviction of the joint 'Committee of Thirty-five' that the time had come to form a World Council of Churches. For an account of this process, see, e.g., R. Rouse and S. C. Neill (eds.), op. cit., pp.701-708.

3. O. S. Tomkins, op. cit., p.167.

understanding of the relationship between denominations and their distinctive convictions - their creeds, confessions and polity.<sup>1</sup> The member churches were on new terrain in their 'pilgrimage' which called for a new approach to questions of faith and order.

Whether the close of the era of comparative ecclesiology was somehow causally related to the formation of the World Council of Churches, as Tomkins argued, or whether it was simply coincidental to that event and more strongly related to the feeling within the Faith and Order movement that such pursuits had been sufficiently dealt with at Lausanne and Edinburgh and offered no further fruit, does not concern us here.<sup>2</sup> What is important for our purposes is that the Lund Conference marked the end of the predominance of the practice of comparative ecclesiology and the beginning of the predominance of a new ecumenical methodology.<sup>3</sup> In the 'Report to the Churches' it was recorded that:

'We have seen clearly that we can make no real advance towards unity if we only compare our several conceptions of the nature of the Church and the traditions in which they are embodied ... We need ... to penetrate behind our divisions to a deeper and richer understanding of the mystery of the God-given union of Christ with His Church. We need increasingly to realise that the separate histories of our Churches find their full meaning only if seen in the perspective of God's dealings with His whole people.'<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.168f.

2. Cf. H. E. Fey, op. cit., pp.151-156, and B. Till, The Churches Search for Unity, Penguin Books, 1972, p.239.

3. For descriptions of this methodological change in direction see, e.g., D. P. Gains, The World Council of Churches - A Study of its Background and History, Richard R. Smith Co. Inc., Peterborough, New Hampshire, 1966, pp.484f, and E. Lange, And Yet It Moves - Dream and Reality in the Ecumenical Movement, translated by E. Robertson, edited by K. Raiser and L. Vischer, Christian Journals Limited, Belfast and Ottawa, The World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1978, pp.39ff.

4. O. S. Tomkins (ed.), op. cit., p.15.

The Report later went on to affirm that:

'We must always make sure in contending for our distinctive convictions that we distinguish between the confession of the Truth to which we are committed and those expressions of it that were in part products of a particular age. If all denominations are prepared to do this in obedience to the Gospel alone, we may well come nearer to one another.'<sup>1</sup>

The work of Faith and Order subsequent to Lund was characterised by this perception of their task.<sup>2</sup> This of course need not have had any significant bearing on particular sets of union negotiations in particular places, but as a matter of fact this new methodology was found to be most appropriate by the Australian uniting churches engaging in their post-war ecumenical task. In 1965 Davis McCaughey wrote:

'I doubt if on the Joint Commission we ever sat down and consciously said that these negotiations must take place in a post-Lundian atmosphere, or that we in our little corner were marking the end of comparative ecclesiology. Yet it cannot be denied that we shared in the new impetus and new hope which came into Faith and Order discussions between Lund and Montreal.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.61f.
  2. Cf. D. P. Gaines, and E. Lange, op. cit., both of whom observe that in so far as this identification of 'the Truth' and 'the Gospel' could be assisted through an empirical study it meant a return to the Scriptures as the source of Christology, but that equally important was the understanding that the churches make this 'return' in cooperation with each other.
  3. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XVII, 1965, p.41. In a later article, 'Faith and Order : A Tribute', The Reformed World, Vol. 34, No.6, 1977, pp.243-250, McCaughey described more fully and gave more emphasis to the 'decisive influence on our method' of Faith and Order (pp.244f). But the influence of the Faith and Order movement is described more in terms of providing a general ethos for the Australian negotiations; the specific influence of the post-Lundian methodology being inferred, but only as part of the wider ecumenical milieu.

When the Joint Commission met, having accepted the suggestion of the Presbyterian General Assembly of 1957 that priority be given to question of faith and order,<sup>1</sup> papers were tabled giving accounts of the distinctive positions of the three denominations with respect to Scripture, Creed and Sacraments. The Commission soon learned to avoid a 'comparative' discussion of these matters, however, and rather addressed a more basic issue: '... what belongs to the true and full life and faith of the Church?'.<sup>2</sup> Rather than weld together three characteristic doctrinal positions, or to piece them together by a process of adjustment, assimilation and reduction, the Commission sought to uncover a theological basis for unity in the church's faith. And this church with whose faith they were concerned was not just the Presbyterian, Methodist or Congregational church, nor a reconstruction of these into one church, but the church of God. In terms of Lund, their interest was in 'God's dealing with His whole people', and their aim was to identify and express 'the Truth'. According to the Preface to the First Report, The Faith of the Church (1959):

'All the members gave full assent to the view that priority must be given in our discussions to the uncovering of a basis of unity in a commonly held Christian Faith, and in a common understanding of what pertains to the true structure of the Church's life.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. McCaughey, in 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.39, identifies this as the first of four 'critical decisions' of the Joint Commission.
  2. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.39.
  3. The Faith of the Church, The First Report of the Joint Commission on Church Union (1959), The Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, 1978, p.9.

It would be too simple to regard this approach to the work of negotiating a church union as just an expression of the ecumenical atmosphere after Lund, though this 'new impetus and new hope' was certainly important for the Joint Commission. It is more accurate to see Lund as providing a timely rationale and methodology by which the Joint Commission might discover a basis on which the uniting churches could fit themselves for the call to mission and service in their time and place : a socially metamorphose, suddenly 'Asian', and secular Australia. The response to the 'cul-de-sac' of comparative ecclesiology was one thing, the demand to be the church in the new Australia was another; and the Reports of the Joint Commission testify to their over-riding concern with the latter. According to McCaughey:

'... we wished our ears to be open to what God has said, is saying and would say to and about his Church, before we listened too closely to the understandings and misunderstandings of their own traditions by Australian churches, and attempted the rather fruitless task of seeing how such statements could be made consistent one with another.'<sup>1</sup>

Few commentators have tried to give a name to the alternative to the methodology of 'comparative ecclesiology'. One who did so was Ernst Lange, who designated the post-Lundian methodology of Faith and Order 'critical ecclesiology'.<sup>2</sup> This term is helpful because it indicates an essential element of the new methodology, namely, that churches willing to approach union negotiations in a way that goes beyond mere comparison and fraternal compromise would have to submit

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1. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.41.

2. E. Lange, op. cit., p.40.

to a critical valuation of their ecclesiological 'treasures'; and not in private but with and before their negotiating partners. Before the unique and normative event of Christ, to which witness is found in Scripture, and before the contemporary call of God to faith and obedience in the world, the churches must acknowledge that their ecclesiological traditions and habits have no unconditional authority. The essence of this method of critical ecclesiology as it was pursued in Australia was the 'listening' of which McCaughey wrote.

(ii) Beyond confessionality

In Part I of its First Report, The Faith of the Church, the Joint Commission signalled its awareness of the historical moment in which the uniting churches were placed, and indicated its willingness to allow this context to condition its deliberations as it listened for God's contemporary call. The historical milieu of the Australian churches was as much in evidence as the emerging theological response to that context in this illuminating paragraph from the Report:

'The Assyrian of the twentieth century - the scourge of the Lord's wrath upon His people - has been modern paganism in all its forms, raised up in judgement against a Church itself corrupted by too much detachment from, or assimilation to, the world. The traditional formulations of the Church's relation to the State, to society and to culture have been proved inadequate for the interpretation of twentieth-century phenomena. The Church has been compelled to think afresh of her own distinctive mission and nature, and to ask again: What is God doing with His world? In this holocaust of traditional securities, customary alignments no longer stand. Men with the mark of the cross on their foreheads have no longer been allowed to look at the world as Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Independent or Methodist. Those who really live in the twentieth century have experienced too much - some in



their physical bodies and others in the depths of the human spirit - to be content with denominational panaceas. He who would recall us simply to be better Congregationals, Methodists, or Presbyterians would call us out of the twentieth century; and as for us, we will not go. The way forward must be with the living Christ, the Lord of this perplexing world.<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph reads with special force in that it was included in that section of the Report which addressed the question of '... our attitude towards the forms of words in which the Faith by which the Church lives has from time to time been set forth'.<sup>2</sup> This question itself indicated the new understanding of the relationship between the churches and their distinctive convictions, distinguishing as it did between 'the Faith' and the verbal witness to that faith, and acknowledging the historical or 'occasional' nature of confession and, by implication, the permanent or continuing validity of the faith which is the object of this confession which takes place 'from time to time'.

With its powerful metaphors describing the impotency of the divided churches trying to cope with the agony and trauma of recent history, the paragraph which we quoted announced the nature of what was to follow in the Report. Having discussed and affirmed the value of the ancient creeds and traditional confessions in providing a 'derivative' witness to Jesus Christ, 'the divine Word definitively set forth in Scripture',<sup>3</sup> the Commission argued that confession alone

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1. The Faith of the Church, op. cit., p.26.

2. Ibid., p.11.

3. Ibid., p.19. This discussion is found on pp.13-24 of the Report.

was insufficient for the health of the twentieth-century Church. The distinctive convictions on which their churches were founded, and which had been considered sufficiently important to divide them from one another, were now described as 'denominational panaceas'. The miraculous cure-all that had been thought to be found in devotion to the creeds, confessions and traditions of the particular churches was now seen as a 'quack remedy' by the Commission. They did not believe that the cause of Christ would be most appropriately pursued by a more rigorous adherence to their particular denominational understandings and expressions of the Faith. A more thoroughgoing devotion to, for example, Presbyterianism, relevant as it was to the sixteenth century in Scotland, comforting as it was in 1924 and necessary as it might have been in 1951 in Australia, was considered in 1959 to be an inappropriate response to the call of God. For the Commission, confessing was an inseparable corollary to the Confession of the church.

There was no question of dispensing with the traditional creeds and confessions, but the Commission sought to emphasise that their true value could only be appreciated when due consideration was paid to their limitations. In the first place a confession has authority only in so far as it points to and 'puts itself under' the witness of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> In the second place a confession made in a certain time and place is always subject to 'eschatological correction',

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1. Cf. the Lundian view that the churches might find unity by a return to Scripture, the 'source' of their particular expressions of the faith. O. S. Tomkins (ed.), The Third World Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., pp.61f.

speaking as it does of something of which it knows wholly but not in its particularity, and always remaining open to the possibility of correction by the Word of God.<sup>1</sup> But within these limitations the true value of a confession can be found. For the Commission, it is precisely in its pointing towards Scripture and its speaking within and to an historical situation that a confession is seen to possess true worth and authority. Of the Reformation Confessions they said:

'They share with all great Christian utterances the scandal of particularity; but what is rooted in a particular act of obedience or confession may have universal significance. Indeed only that which has a particular context can have universal authority. It is of the nature of Christian confession, not that it should consist of general truths or statements, but that it should be wrung from living men, who find themselves confronted by Pontius Pilate.'<sup>2</sup>

To the surprise of many European observers, the Joint Commission drew on the example of Barmen and the Confessing Church of war-time Germany in their negotiation of a church union in Australia.<sup>3</sup> The theology of Karl Barth, who played no incidental part in the formulation of the Barmen Declaration, was an important influence on the Commission as is abundantly clear from the Reports. It was against a largely Barthian backdrop that the Commission presented the tableau

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1. The Faith of the Church, op. cit., pp.19f. Not surprisingly there is a citation in the Report at this point from Barth's Church Dogmatics (I.2.).
  2. Ibid., p.18.
  3. The Australians did not wish to pretend to be in a status confessionis comparable to the extreme danger of the church in Germany under Hitler, but they did claim an enduring significance for the message of the Confessing Church. See ibid., p.27f. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.41.

of the Confessing Church for the instruction of the uniting churches. Barth's analysis is helpful in understanding the perspective of the Joint Commission at this point in the Report.

Barth's assumption of religion under Divine grace, initially and forcefully developed in 'The Epistle to the Romans', had important implications for the understanding of the relationship of the church to its Confession. No 'sacred' word or thing, no doctrinal formulation or system of polity can be allowed anything but secondary value in providing for the approach to or knowledge of God. God's gracious, and nonreligious, condescension must be given priority.<sup>1</sup> As Barth developed this in Church Dogmatics he set forth an understanding of the knowledge of God which included that this knowledge be a knowledge of faith and obedience. It is a cognition of 'truth', but one which is relational and on-going; dependent on and subsequent to God's grace. God's self-revelation is not received 'at a stroke' and thereafter to become the object of empirical investigation. God's self-disclosure takes place by grace 'again and again', calling for faith and obedience through a succession of attestations to the Word which was revealed 'at the heart of time' in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

'... our standing before God in truth is a walking before Him in consequence of His walking before us in ever new forms of His one revelation with us.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf. K. Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, translated from the sixth edition by E. C. Hoskyns, Oxford University Press, London, 1933, on I.16, p.36; on IV.11, p.130; on V.13f, p.174; on IX.3, p.337.
  2. Cf. K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. II.1, G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance (eds.), T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1957, pp.23, 26 and 61f.
  3. Ibid., p.62.

Confession, therefore, is precisely the confession of faith. The words of the church's confession are not primarily a definition of the faith, but are an expression of faith. They are what the faithful may say and are in that sense indicative of the faith of the church. The knowledge of God, which is a knowledge of faith and obedience, precipitates and gives meaning to confession.

In his lectures on the Apostles' Creed in 1946, on his return to Germany after the war, Barth spelt out with a sense of moment the 'public responsibility' of faith. Confession, if it is genuinely the expression of faith, must translate and indeed be translated from the language of the church into the language of the day. Confession is properly accompanied by confessing.<sup>1</sup>

'Where confession is serious and clear, it must be fundamentally translatable into the speech of Mr. Everyman, the man and woman in the street, into the language of those who are not accustomed to reading Scripture and singing hymns, but who possess a quite different vocabulary and quite different spheres of interest. Such is the world into which Christ sent His disciples and in which each of us exist too ...

Let us beware of remaining stuck where we are and refusing to advance to meet worldly attitudes. For instance, in 1933 in Germany there was plenty of serious, profound and living Christianity and confession - God be praised and thanked! But unfortunately this Faith and confession of the German Church remained embedded in the language of the Church, and did not translate what was being excellently said in the language of the Church into the political attitude demanded at

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1. K. Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, SCM Press Ltd., 1949, pp.30-34.

the time; in which it would have become clear that the Evangelical Church had to say 'No' to National Socialism, 'No' from its very roots.<sup>1</sup>

Barth's 'but unfortunately' reflected the heartbreak of all Christian churches which saw that blame could not be laid at the feet of the German Evangelical Church alone, but with all churches which had consistently failed to express the faith which they had received intelligibly in their particular historical contexts. Confessional purity is not the same as fidelity to the Gospel. The former does not guarantee the latter. True faithfulness is at once a faithfulness to the witness of those who have gone before (faithfulness in and to the church), and faithfulness to the call of God in the present (faithfulness in and to the world).

The Joint Commission, therefore, identified in the Barmen Declaration and the Confessing Church two lessons for 'the man of the twentieth century who is willing to look and see'. First, the affirmation of the centrality of Jesus Christ as the Word of God. The church of the twentieth century has as its only message the first

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1. Ibid., pp.32f. For an understanding of Barth's perspective on the struggle against Nazism and the German-Christians see K. Barth, The German Church Conflict, translated by P. T. A. Parker, edited by A. M. Allchin, M. E. Marty and T. H. L. Parker, 'Ecumenical Studies in History' No.1, Lutterworth Press, London, 1965, in which are collected writings of Barth on the subject between 1933 and 1939. Barth's plea, 'Let us at last act as we have confessed! For otherwise what use are all our confessions and confessional fronts?' (p.39) is given historical and theological substance in this volume. For an account of Barth's influence on the conflict in the church of war-time Germany see A. S. Duncan-Jones, The Struggle for Religious Freedom in Germany, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1938, p.29 and pp.40-42, and also A. C. Cochrane, The Church's Confession Under Hitler, 2nd Edition, The Pickwick Press, Pittsburgh, 1976, and E. C. Helmreich, The German Churches Under Hitler - Background, Struggle, and Epilogue, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1979.

century message of Jesus Christ. The great fact to which the church bears witness remains, to use Barthian terms, the unity of the Word of God with the man Jesus.<sup>1</sup> 'He is the centre of our worship, the content of our preaching, the beginning and end of all our theology.'<sup>2</sup> Second, the 'call to go beyond confessionalism' was seen as addressed to the Australian churches. The confessional basis of the churches is not to be set aside, but the acknowledgement of the living Christ who addresses the church in the contemporary world elicits an enunciation of the faith appropriate to the historical occasion. The Confession which is permanent in nature is properly accompanied by confessing which is occasional. The relationship between the church and its Confession is dynamic. The example of Barmen was taken as demonstrating that it is:

'... not enough for the Church to be Confessional (Bekennniskirche), i.e. based upon a Reformation Confession, it must also be Confessing (Bekennende Kirche), i.e. applying these confessions to its own day, confessing Jesus Christ now before the Pilates of this world.'<sup>3</sup>

The Commission put four questions to the Australian churches which they saw to arise out of the 'instructive instance' of Barmen and the Confessing Church.

'(a) Is our message unequivocally conditioned by what God has said to man in Jesus Christ?

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1. Cf. K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. II.1, op. cit., p.61.
  2. The Faith of the Church, op. cit., p.27.
  3. Ibid. The Commission also observed that the Barmen Declaration was made 'across denominational frontiers' by Christians of both Lutheran and Reformed traditions. Understood in these terms, Barmen, as much as Lund, called for the end of a 'comparative' approach to the search for a basis of unity in the faith of the church.

- (b) In listening to that Word have we sought the aid and guidance of our confessing forebears?
- (c) Are those of us who value the traditions of the past and cherish them, equally prepared to confess the Faith afresh in the present?  
...
- (d) Are we facing the world, or just facing each other?<sup>1</sup>

For the Commission confrontation with the world, particularly post-war Australia, demanded a response from the church. If the church's confessing is 'aided' and 'guided' by its Confession, the idiom in which it speaks is learnt from the language of the world, and the occasion to which it speaks is identified through its engagement in the world. The way in which the church presents itself and its proclamation to the world is determined by the historical moment, in which God calls for faith and obedience.

(iii) The time and place to confess

This historical moment included the newly developed relationship with Asia. For the Commission, the emergence of indigenous Asian churches was seen as a constitutive element in the historical 'occasion', which was the context of their negotiation for church union in Australia. The formation of the Church of South India, and negotiations toward the formation of united churches in North India and Ceylon were to be allowed a conditioning and instructive influence on Australian negotiations and the Commission's answer to the question of the faith of the church. Australia was seen as sharing with Asia a common

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1. Ibid., p.28.



environment and 'evangelistic problems', and therefore a 'particular call of God' which was not shared with 'Western Churches'. In terms of its response to God's call to mission and service, the Australian church was not western but south-eastern, if not Asian.<sup>1</sup> Reinforcing themes which we have observed, the Commission affirmed that:

'The theology of the Church must once more be sharpened by its conversation with the world. Too much traditional theology has removed God's controversy with His people and has put in its place the controversy of the people amongst themselves. The Churches in Asia and Australasia can no longer evade the task of setting forth the gospel as a faith for mankind.'<sup>2</sup>

The 'presenting problem', to use the psychologist's term, for the Joint Commission was the dividedness of the Australian church. They were asked to try to resolve the 'controversy' between God's people in that place. The solution which they offered was not the eirenical one

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1. Ibid., pp.28f. This understanding was seen to have bearing upon the Australian church's responsibility to the Pacific peoples in helping to build up a Pacific church, without the 'irrelevant' hindrances of the disputes of Western Christendom. It is interesting to compare this conviction of the Joint Commission in seeing the Australian church as, in some sense, 'non-western' with the suggestion of the Committee on Faith and Order in its Report to the Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi in 1961 that, 'In Australia and New Zealand, because the conditions are similar (e.g. rapid mobility in population and specific moves toward church unions), the issues to be studied should be similar to those obtaining in North America and Great Britain'. (W. A. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), The New Delhi Report, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1962, p.171.) It was not that the Joint Commission was to ignore the lessons and experiences of the church in the western world, but that they sought to redress the balance by emphasising the importance of their geographical context which had been too long neglected.
  2. Ibid., p.29.

of previous decades, but to redirect the attention of the divided parties from their own controversy to the more urgent controversy which God had with them all; God's call to witness, mission and service in their time and place. Together with the theological perspective gained through attention to Barth, Barmen and Lund, the Commission's missiological concern called for an expression of the faith deriving not from a process of comparison and assimilation but from an attentive and honest listening for the call of God in their time and place. And so the Commission announced:

'... in all humility we deem the present to be an occasion important enough to justify us in speaking afresh of the Faith. The Church in Australia lies sorely divided, bearing witness (albeit falteringly) to traditions formulated in other lands for other days. She hears (albeit imperfectly) the call to a great mission in a land of rapid development and growth, and to the surrounding nations in the Pacific and Asia where the Church is numerically weak and millions have not yet heard the name of Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

Though the Australian churches represented on the Commission were autonomous, no longer 'colonial outposts' of their British counterparts, in terms of doctrine and polity, in terms of their confession, they still belonged to 'other lands' and 'other days'. The time had

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1. Ibid., p.30. We could be forgiven for being reminded here of the Tranquebar Manifesto of 1919, drawn up by the Anglican and South India United Churches: 'We face together the titanic task of the winning of India for Christ - one-fifth of the human race. Yet, confronted by such an overwhelming responsibility, we find ourselves rendered weak and relatively impotent by our unhappy divisions - divisions for which we were not responsible, and which have been, as it were, imposed upon us from without; divisions which we did not create, and which we do not desire to perpetuate'. G. K. A. Bell (ed.), Documents on Christian Unity 1920-1930, op. cit., pp.278f.

come, the historical moment demanded, that the church should cast off its sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth-century British outfit and refit itself for twentieth-century Australia. And furthermore, this process of finding the words and structures to express the faith in their time and place was something that the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches in Australia could and should do together; the task promised, and was itself, a basis for union.

(iv) The Gospel 'rhythm'

If we were to describe the relationship of the church to its Confession on the basis of the First Report of the Joint Commission we would use the word 'dynamic'. The church gives account of the faith through a dynamic to which contribute both the witness of the church of the past and the contemporary experience of the church of the present. The expression of the faith of the church is properly conditioned by both the church's relationship to its tradition and its relationship to the contemporary world.

Further, if we were to describe the act of confessing which is the expression of this dynamic relationship we would not be mistaken to use, in its literal sense, the word 'radical' : radical in the sense of emerging from the roots of the faith, through the witness of Scripture, Creed and Confession; radical in the sense of a thorough, pointed response to the contemporary situation; and radical in the sense of accepting, indeed advocating, basic change in obedience to the perceived call of God.

But to be more theologically precise, and to avoid any misleading nuances attending the word 'radical', we would be better to choose the

designation 'apostolic'. The church's dynamic relationship to its Confession, its act of confessing, is apostolic in the sense of emerging from the apostolic faith as handed down in Scripture, Creed and Confession; apostolic in the sense of proclaiming and interpreting the apostolic message in each successive generation and for each successive historical situation; and apostolic in the sense of being sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit which constantly conditions and corrects the life of the church.<sup>1</sup> And this designation is entirely appropriate since the clear intention of the Commission was to seek its basis for union in the commonly held faith of the church of God; that is, the church catholic, and the church apostolic.

The First Report did not propose a Basis of Union, but a first attempt at a statement concerning Scriptural authority and that of the ancient creeds, the Reformation confessions and the teaching of Wesley and the Evangelical Revival was included. This was revised for inclusion in the proposed Basis of Union which appeared with the Second Report in 1963. Of more importance for our study however is not what the Commission set forth as an affirmation of the faith of the church,<sup>2</sup> but what they demonstrated and affirmed as being the way in which the church confesses the faith. Apostolicity, to return to the term which we have imposed on the Commission's discussion, is an activity, a dynamic process, an ongoing relationship of the church

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1. Cf. the statement of the Lima conference of Faith and Order on 'Apostolic Tradition in the Church' in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No.111, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1982, p.28, paragraph 34.
  2. The Statement of 'The Faith We Affirm In Common' is found in the First Report, op. cit., pp.35-46.

with its past and present. More precisely, it is an ongoing relationship between the church and God.

At an early stage in its work the Commission recognised that to talk of a relationship with God they must of necessity pursue this discussion using the theological categories of judgement and grace, since it is only by this 'rhythm of the gospel' that such a relationship proceeds.<sup>1</sup> It was at this point that their attention was directed towards the Church of South India, and particularly to Lesslie Newbigin's defence of the South India scheme.<sup>2</sup> Applying the doctrine of justification by grace through faith to the life of the church, with particular reference to the church's need to repent of its 'sinful' dividedness by seeking union, Newbigin argued, with direct reference to South India:

'It is possible to believe (as I do) that it is God's will that the Church should be episcopally ordered, and yet deny absolutely that episcopal ordination is essential for a valid ministry. For the being of the Church, and therefore the validity of its ministry, rests not upon the conformity of the Church to God's will but upon the grace of God who justifies the ungodly.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. The Commission described this perspective in the Report, op. cit., pp.31-33, 'The Way to Confess our Faith : the grace and judgement under which we stand'. McCaughey gave an account of the second of the four 'critical decisions' of the Commission, that 'the way into union must be according to the rhythm of the Gospel' in his paper 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., pp.41-44.
  2. According to McCaughey, ibid., p.44, Newbigin's article 'Anglicans and Reunion', Theology, 1958, 'providentially came to hand at a time when we were most bewildered about our way forward'. Newbigin's argument was first developed in The Reunion of the Church, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1948; and was more powerfully developed, in the new Introduction to the 1960 edition of the book, after the 'proof' of experience of life in the C.S.I. Cf. A. H. Wood, The Uniting Church of Australia, op. cit., p.11.
  3. L. Newbigin, The Reunion of the Church - A Defence of the South India Scheme, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1960, p.xxxiii.

Though none of the churches represented on the Joint Commission were episcopally ordered, they were nonetheless separated by serious historical and theological disagreements.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, Newbigin's general point was applicable to the Australian situation (and was well taken).

'Conformity to God's will is not the pre-condition of fellowship with Him, but the fruit of it.'<sup>2</sup>

In terms of the application of this principle to the churches' approach to union, this implied a four-fold movement towards unity:

(i) The acknowledgement of the givenness of the faith against which the churches' witness must be measured - 'There is a truth which has claimed us. We do not possess it; it possesses us'.

(ii) The acknowledgement by the churches of their failure to bear witness to that faith as they ought, a 'defection' which included their sin of division - 'We have been effectively polemical and self-satisfyingly Pharisaic. We have won the argument, but lost the mystery of the Faith'.

(iii) The acknowledgement that in spite of this failure God has blessed and preserved the church, even those parts of it that have rejected each other - 'We have deserved nothing, we have earned

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1. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', *op. cit.*, p.39, where the seriousness of this disagreement is indicated. See also G. L. Barnes, 'A United Church is Born in Australia', *Mid-Stream*, Volume XVI, No.4, October 1977, p.417, where he records the realization of 'deeply felt' sociological and theological differences between the uniting churches.

2. L. Newbigin, *op. cit.*, p.xxxiv.

nothing; yet, even in our sinful, divided state, God has not left us'.

(iv) And the undertaking, with the help of God, to enter more fully into the faith, and to do this together - 'The penitent sinner seeks amendment of life; and churches which repent the partiality of their witness will seek to come together in the unity of the Faith, more fully than they have previously known'.<sup>1</sup>

Although the understanding of this way of confessing the faith as a way of moving into church union had nowhere else been expressed so clearly, neither in the Faith and Order movement nor in the run up to union in South India, it was nonetheless a creative appropriation of the lessons of both these activities. The first two steps of the movement evolved directly from the application of the methodology of critical ecclesiology; a method by which the Australian churches submitted their ecclesiological treasures to a valuation against the faith, and found themselves to be impoverished, even bankrupt. The last two steps of the movement were learned from the experience of the Church of South India; an experience from which the Australian churches learnt that, sharing a common sin, the only real precondition for union that they might ask of one another was to share a common sense of penitence, that together they might, with God's help, repent. By approaching union according to this rhythm of the gospel, the Commission found a way to undercut the historical and theological conditions that separated the uniting churches.

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1. The Faith of the Church, op. cit., pp.31-33. See also, J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., pp.42f.

This 'way' of confessing the church's faith not only provided a basis on which to propose a scheme of union, it further implied the manner in which the united church should continue to confess the faith after union had been accomplished.

'... faith is not a way of knowing what has been objectively given, apart from a relation of trust and obedience which is conditioned by the One who grasps and holds us.

The Church will therefore guard against allowing that which is necessary but secondary to play a dominant part in her life. No system of Church government, no rules or precedents, no system of doctrine or ethics, no technique of evangelism, no tradition of men regarding the ordering of worship, is sufficiently free from error to be permitted to hold anything but a subordinate position in the life of the Christian Church. Only by setting forth as the primary ground for her existence God's justifying act in Jesus Christ, apprehended in the Church by faith, can the Church prevent a proper concern for law from deteriorating into legalism, a proper concern for morals deteriorating into moralism, a proper concern for theology deteriorating into intellectualism, a proper awareness of the grace set forth in the sacraments from deteriorating into sacramentalism ... The hope in which we hold the Faith speaks at once of correction and fulfilment ... The structure of the Church's life must reflect this hope in which we stand. We are a people in via ... In the Church there must be that which conserves the Faith, and there must be that which subjects our statements of the Faith to a radical criticism.<sup>1</sup>

The primary contribution of the commissioners who produced the First Report to the life of the Uniting Church in Australia was not

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1. The Faith of the Church, op. cit., pp.43 and 45. As well as the obvious Barthian influence on these passages, the argument of Leslie Newbigin, op. cit., was also being reflected; in particular his description of the development in the C.S.I. of what he called a 'theology of the Church-in-motion', pp.xxx and xxxii.



in what they set forth as a statement of the faith of the church, but in what they affirmed as the way in which the church should confess the faith. Their contribution was not in defining the faith but in describing where the faith is to be found and how the church should bear witness to the faith in its own time and place. The enduring significance of the Report was not in a definition of what the church of God believes, but in their description of what it means for the church to be faithful to God, whose she is.

'Faith comes by hearing, and we asked men and women to listen again.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. J. D. McCaughey, Preface to the 1978 edition of The Faith of the Church, op. cit., p.5.

## Section Two

The Second Report of the Joint Commission on Church

Union : The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering

(1963). Part One : The Nature and Function of the Church.

- (i) The continuity of the Reports
- (ii) The 'duality' of the church
- (iii) The church's missionary function : ministry
- (iv) The set apart ministry in the church's mission
- (v) Summary

(i) The continuity of the Reports

When we turn our attention from the First Report to the Second Report of the Joint Commission on Church Union, The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering (1963), the fact that is most striking, obvious though it may sound, is the essential continuity of the two Reports. Though the changes of representatives on the Commission<sup>1</sup> might suggest the likelihood of a modification of perspective or emphasis, the change in agenda would seem, on the surface at least, to call for a different approach altogether. The Commission might have reasonably expected the indulgence of the churches they represented in adopting a thoroughly theological approach to the question of the faith of the church,<sup>2</sup> but in the serious matter of hammering out a scheme of union likely to win the approval of a sufficient majority of the churches' memberships such esoteric excursions would surely not be countenanced. Yet from the outset it was clear that the Second Report was to build on the foundation provided by the work already done. In the Introduction to the Second Report was this statement of method:

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1. See Appendix I. The six new members of the Commission represented a change in membership of almost one third. The four Consultants named would also be expected to exert some influence on the deliberations of the Commission. In particular, Colin Williams and George Yule played key roles in drafting the Report. They brought a new perspective to this stage of the Commission's work.
  2. G. L. Barnes, op. cit., p.414, noted that the First Report 'mostly failed to excite the interest of the laity'. Barnes, incidentally, was one of the new members named in the Second Report. Cf. also J. J. Mol's sociological study, 'The Merger Attempts of the Australian Churches', The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XXI, January 1969, pp.23-31, which showed the virtual 'irrelevance' of theological and doctrinal matters to the attitude of church members to union.

'If we had simply asked the question, "What is the least troublesome way to bring the present three churches together?" The answer might have been different. It is the conviction of the Commission, however, that this would have been a faithless avoidance of the call of God to open ourselves to the renewing power of His Word - ready, if need be, to leave some of our familiar ways, if thereby we may be more truly His servants.'<sup>1</sup>

The Commission remained unshaken in its view that there was no denominational nostrum to meet their churches' need. Only an attentive listening for, and obedience to, the call of God could serve the health of the church and help to fit it for its life in that time and place in Australia. Foreshadowing the way in which the theological convictions of the Commission expressed in the First Report were to be applied to their discussion of the church, the Introduction went on in its account of the method used:

'It would, of course, be faithlessness to fail to take seriously the witness of our fathers and the traditions in which we have been nurtured. But equally it would be faithless to neglect the truth, to which all our traditions witness : that because the one head of the Church is Jesus Christ, she must constantly be ready to hear the living Word that He is speaking to the Church and be reformed and renewed so that she may the more faithfully carry on His mission to the world. This double emphasis is an essential insight of the Reformers.'<sup>2</sup>

As they had previously approached the negotiation of a doctrinal agreement through a prior consideration of the faith to which their traditions all bore witness and of the nature of confession by which

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, the Second Report of the Joint Commission on Church Union (1963), The Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1964, p.8.
  2. Ibid.

they bore witness, the Commission continued to pursue this method in their negotiation of an agreement on polity. The first thing to be considered was, for them, the nature of the church and its function within the redemptive will of God. According to the understanding of these matters they would then discuss the ordering of the church such that it might best reflect its nature and fulfil its function. Davis McCaughey later observed that their 'natural' inclination, having reached a doctrinal agreement, was to move directly to a statement on sacraments and ministry, but that their decision to place discussion of these in the wider context was the 'logical consequence' of the methodological decisions previously taken.<sup>1</sup>

(ii) The 'duality' of the church

In their discussion of the nature of the church, as a basis for its ordering, the Commission found an awareness of the 'duality' of the church to be essential to the task of giving it particular forms. This aspect of the church's quiddity ought to be expressed in its structures.

The essential duality of the church was seen to be indicated in the titles given to it. The church is called the church, the ecclesia, of God reflecting the Old Testament designation of Israel as the Qahal, the assembly of the people of God. This was taken to imply the continuity of the church with Israel, as its successor. The newness

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1. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.44. McCaughey identified the decision, that 'consideration of the Church, its nature, function and mission should precede that of ministry', as the third of four 'critical decisions'.

of the church is indicated in the New Testament by the assertion that it is the ecclesia which is en Christo.<sup>1</sup> The church is called the Body of Christ, indicating its incorporation into God's redemptive work in Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension. But while the church is called the Body of Christ, it is a body which is subject to 'growth'. 'We are incorporate into Christ, but as those who must become what we are.'<sup>2</sup> The church is the Fellowship of the Spirit, participating in the gift of the Spirit of unity which cuts through the divisions of human society. But the church remains in need of the receipt of the gifts of the Spirit 'until we all attain to the unity of the faith'; and in anticipation of the unity of humankind 'figured forth at Pentecost' is 'driven out in mission'.<sup>3</sup>

The duality which the Commission identified was between what is given, what the church is, and what is promised, what the church is to become. It was not taken to suggest a distinction between the church 'visible' and the church 'invisible', the latter being somehow the 'true' church. The church is truly visible, expressing in the present, 'old', age the new age. Its life and growth is an expression of the new era in the midst of the present era, and it is in this that the Commission found the origin of the duality of the church.<sup>4</sup>

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.12f. The Report cites 1 Thess. 2:14, Gal. 1:22, and Rom. 16:16.
  2. Ibid., pp.14f. The Report cites, e.g. Col. 2:19.
  3. Ibid., pp.15f. The Report cites, e.g. Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11 and Eph. 4:13.
  4. Ibid., p.16.

Influencing the Commission's discussion at this point was the work of Eduard Schweizer.<sup>1</sup> In his book Church Order in the New Testament, Schweizer included a chapter entitled 'The Twofold View' in which he discussed the duality of the church in these terms:

'The message about Jesus, the risen Lord, must be proclaimed, and Israel must be called to repentance. And yet at the same time the Church knows that it has already been raised out of all time and history ... When it looks at the missionary task that has been set it, it has a road before it on which the risen Lord will be with it ... If it looks at the meeting that it has already had with the risen Lord, at his constantly renewed presence in the Lord's Supper, and at the Holy Spirit who has been poured out over it and who makes his activity known through signs, then it knows that it is living in the fulfilment of all promises.'<sup>2</sup>

The Commission expressed an understanding of the church which demanded that this duality be held together - a duality between what

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1. Schweizer's book Church Order in the New Testament, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1961 (new edition 1979), had been published in English in 1961, in good time to be considered by the Commission. A lengthy citation from this book was included in the Report (p.34) and it was also referred to in footnotes. As well as the section on the duality of the church, other sections of the Report reflected certain of Schweizer's emphases. In particular Schweizer's 'Barthian' emphasis on church as an 'event' and on the nature of the church being expressed in forms which are 'occasional' or 'provisional' was repeatedly echoed in the Report. I am indebted to Colin Williams for confirming this impression. Schweizer was not alone in substantiating a Barthian perspective from a study of the New Testament. Jean-Louis Leuba, e.g., had also identified an institution/event dualism in the New Testament and we shall discuss his findings and influence on the Commission in sub-section (iv) below. This ecclesiological dualism was also emphasised in Faith and Order studies prior to Montreal. References to these studies will be made in several of the footnotes following.

2. Ibid., (1979), p.164.

the church has received and what it is promised, between what it is and what it is to become, between the fact of its existence and its raison d'être.<sup>1</sup>

The Report identified two aspects or facets of this duality. The first was seen as being due to the fact that while the life of the church comes from Christ, 'the eternal one', it also participates in the temporality of the world. The church has a 'divine' character by virtue of its being the 'institution' of Christ who is present in the 'means of grace' through which the church is preserved and which are preserved in the church. It is the church's responsibility to express this character, showing itself to be an institution 'in' but not 'of' the world.<sup>2</sup> The Report saw this as being accomplished in so far as the church is 'loyal' to : the faith of the church, 'guarding' and witnessing to the message of Christ's redemptive work;<sup>3</sup> the sacraments, ministry and order by which God has provided for the life of the church; the responsibility to witness to the Lordship of Christ; and the 'truth' or example of Christ 'by responding to His life in showing love to the brethren and by accepting the call to assume with Christ the servant form in the service of the world'.<sup>4</sup>

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1. To set this understanding in a wider ecumenical context, cf. P. C. Rodger and L. Vischer (eds.), The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order - Montreal 1963, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1964, 'The Church : Act and Institution', pp.44f, especially paragraph 23.
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.16f.
  3. Ibid., p.16. This is described in terms of the understanding expressed in the First Report which we discussed in Section I of this chapter.
  4. Ibid., p.17.



In its faith, worship, mission and manner of service, the church is distinguished from the world in which it lives.

But the church also has a temporal character in that God redeems humankind within the historical order. In its humanity, the humanity which God seeks to redeem, the church must accept that it must from time to time choose leaders, engage in consultation, take votes, and deal with disagreements.<sup>1</sup> The Commission therefore concluded:

'For this reason, the Church must also reveal in her life characteristics that reveal her immersion in the world. She must keep her Church order flexible and free, in order to respond to Christ in the ever-new forms of obedience necessary to bring the Word of Christ to men.'<sup>2</sup>

While the origin of the church's life is eternal and immutable, the location of its life is temporal and subject to change. The structures of the church, the forms by which it is engaged in the world, must be sufficiently adaptable to allow the response of obedience to the demand of Christ who seeks to redeem people within history. The eternal Christ is present in the temporally conditioned church whose structures, as well as reflecting its divine nature, naturally reflect all the variety and particularity implied by its location within history. The willingness and ability to modify its structures according to the demands of obedience to Christ in a particular situation is an essential aspect of the role of the church within the redemptive will of God.

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1. Ibid. The Report cites Acts 14:21-23, Acts 15, 2 Cor. 2:16, and Gal. 2.

2. Ibid.

This structural flexibility is in no sense a sign of the disloyalty of one generation to a previous generation. Loyalty to the continuity of the church in all ages includes a willingness in each generation to be the church in a relevant and appropriate way in obedience to Christ. According to the Commission:

'This does not mean that the Gospel changes - it is given once-for-all - but it must be related ever afresh to the changing thought-patterns of life. Neither do the sacraments change, nor is Christ's provision of ministry for His Church subject to alteration; but the Church must always be seeking to relate her sacramental life to, and give expression to her ministries in, a world where there is often rapid movement in the social groupings which fashion human awareness and provide the forms of human need.'<sup>1</sup>

It is worth mentioning, at this point, the influence of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the perspective of the Joint Commission.<sup>2</sup> Though theirs was by no means a thoroughgoing expression of 'religionless Christianity',<sup>3</sup> they did take up Bonhoeffer's challenge to take seriously the secular environment in which they found themselves.

In his fragmentary book, 'Ethics', Bonhoeffer had demanded that the spheres of the sacred and the secular be held together in the one encounter with 'reality'.

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1. Ibid.

2. Colin Williams has indicated in correspondence the importance of this influence at the time when he was involved on the Commission's Drafting Committee.

3. A concise account of what was meant by 'religionless Christianity' may be found in E. H. Robertson, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutterworth Press, London, 1966, p.50. Bethge's account of what his friend Bonhoeffer intended may be found in E. Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Theologian, Christian, Contemporary, translated by E. Mosbacher, P. and B. Ross, F. Clarke and W. Glen-Doepel, Collins, Fontana Books, 1977 edition, pp.773-776.

'In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world, and when I encounter the reality of the world it is always already sustained, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God.'<sup>1</sup>

Later, in his prison writings, Bonhoeffer began to push this understanding further. In rejecting the tutelary dominance of religion, and in affirming the world as being 'come of age', he saw that this implied a new understanding of the nature of the church. Initially Bonhoeffer gives a christological answer to the ecclesiological question:

'In what way are we "religionless-secular" Christians, in what way are we the ek-klesia, those who are called forth, not regarding ourselves from a religious point of view as specially favoured, but rather as belonging wholly to the world? In that case Christ is no longer the object of religion, but something<sup>2</sup> quite different, really the Lord of the world.'<sup>2</sup>

Later he proposed the summary of what was developing as his ecclesiological answer which, significantly, remained within a christological framework.

'The church is the church only when it exists for others ... The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. D. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, edited by E. Bethge, translated by Neville Horton Smith, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1955, p.61. This understanding is developed especially in the second chapter of the book, 'Christ, Reality and Good', pp.55-78.
  2. D. Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, The Enlarged Edition, edited by E. Bethge, translated by R. Fuller, F. Clarke, J. Bowden, et al., SCM Press Ltd., London, 1971, p.279.
  3. Ibid., pp.382f.

In affirming the temporal character of the church and insisting that it be held together with its divine character, the Commission laid a basis on which the church might organise itself for effective engagement in the world. They closed all 'routes of escape' from the demand to be Christ's church in the world. Moreover, the view that the manner of the church's involvement in the world be according to the manner of Christ, that is, as a 'servant', was given explicit expression in the Commission's Report. These emphases will be seen to continue throughout the Report.<sup>1</sup>

The second aspect of the duality of the church which the Commission identified was seen as being due to the fact that the church is not only immersed in the temporality, but also in the sinfulness of the world.<sup>2</sup> The 'imputation' of righteousness by which the

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1. Again, though they were certainly influenced by the important emphases of Bonhoeffer, it should be recognised that the Commission did not seek to express a thoroughgoing 'religionless Christianity'. In the first place, Bonhoeffer's work on this theme was never completed. Indeed, recent studies support the view that his prison writings do not represent a radical break with his earlier thought, an 'epistemological shift' to use Bachelard's and Althusser's term, but that the inner core of his theology remained unchanged. See A. Dumas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Theologian of Reality, translated by Robert McAfee Brown, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1971, pp.165-168; and E. Bethge, Bonhoeffer : Exile and Martyr, edited by J. W. De Gruchy, Collins, London, 1975, pp.137-154. In the second place, the Commission remained under the influence of Barthian theology. Dumas, in 'Religion and Reality in the Work of Bonhoeffer', contained in A. J. Klassen (ed.), A Bonhoeffer Legacy - Essays in Understanding, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981, pp.258-267, provides a description of the distinction between Barth's attack and Bonhoeffer's more determined assault on 'religion', the former 'restoring dialectically' what the latter sought to dispense with altogether (p.262). Cf. also H. Ott, Reality and Faith - The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, translated by A. A. Morrison, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1972, p.59, and R. Prenter, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth's Positivism of Revelation', in R. Gregor Smith (ed.), World Come of Age - A Symposium on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Collins, London, 1967, pp.93-130.
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, pp.17f.

church lives is accompanied by an 'impartation' of righteousness as the relationship with Christ 'brings forth fruits'. This impartation is not fully realised in the present age and so the church continues to live by forgiveness. In the view which was held by the Commission, the church, as much as its individual members, must be understood as simul justus et peccator. The church has a 'tendency' towards disobedience to Christ, even though its very existence depends on the redemptive work of Christ and obedience to his call. Restating the understanding which had been developed in the First Report, the Commission affirmed that, not only in the approach to union, but by its very nature the church at all times must continue to live according to the rhythm of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

These facets of the church's duality were found by the Commission to be expressed in certain New Testament imagery. The church is a 'pilgrim people' rescued from the slavery of sin, now led through the wilderness, being fed on its way, with Christ as her new Moses, her Archegos or leader. The church is the 'branches' nourished on Christ the true Vine, but constantly in need of pruning for their health and fruitfulness. The church is the 'bride' of Christ being prepared for her presentation, though constantly in danger of being unfaithful.<sup>2</sup> The Commission gleaned certain implications from this, including a warning:

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1. Cf. the preliminary discussion of the church's duality in P. S. Minear (ed.), Faith and Order Findings, The Final Report of the Theological Commissions to the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal 1963, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1963, The Report of the Theological Commission on 'Christ and the Church', Part I, p.19, 'From Christology to Ecclesiology'. We would recall Lesslie Newbigin's argument in The Reunion of the Church, op. cit., which we discussed in Section I(iv) of this chapter.
  2. Ibid., p.18. The Report cites (i) Heb. 2:10; 1 Pet. 2:9-11; Titus 2:11-14; (ii) Jn. 15; cf. Isa. 5; (iii) Eph. 5:26f; Hosea 9:1; 11:8f.

'It must be our fear that because of our unfaithfulness, Christ may use His sovereign Lordship to bring out from amongst us those who raise the true banner of the Word, in order that the true Church may reform around it ... Christ the living Lord still speaks to us through the Word given once-for-all in history, and always provides for us in the sacraments and ministry He then instituted. Never does He change or add to them. Nevertheless, it must be our fear that while we lay claim to these historic gifts, we may so stultify them in the casements of a past age, or so distort them and be unfaithful to them, that Christ may break through the order He has given us to carry on His mission.'<sup>1</sup>

The willingness and ability of the church to be re-formed is necessary not only because of its need, in obedience to Christ, to be relevantly and appropriately engaged in the world, but also because of its need to repent of its disobedience to the contemporary call of the living Lord. The church places itself in danger by failing to acknowledge and deal with its 'tendency' towards disobedience.

(iii) The church's missionary function : ministry

In the discussion of the nature of the church and its structural expression it was implied that the need for flexibility, which allows the response of obedience and repentance of disobedience, is also demanded by virtue of the fact that the church has an essential raison d'être. The church exists for a purpose. The nature and purpose of the church are closely related in the way they affect its structural expression of both. The function of the church is intimated in our previous quotations from the Second Report. The church must keep its order flexible and free to allow its response to Christ in 'ever new

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1. Ibid., pp.18f.

forms of obedience necessary to bring the Word of Christ to men'. The church must structure itself in a way that maintains its relevance in a rapidly changing society, the developments of which 'fashion human awareness and provide the forms of human need'. The church must remain open to the reformation of repentance conscious that it is within the power of the Sovereign Christ, when confronted with an unfaithful church, to 'break through the order He has given us to carry on His mission'. The function of the church, the fulfilment of which is its purpose, was discussed under the designation 'ministry'.

Reflecting once again Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological summary, the Commission affirmed that the church, by nature and function, is the 'Servant People of the Servant Lord'.<sup>1</sup> They spoke of a 'polarity in the life of the Church - an alternation, a rhythm'.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand Christians are withdrawn from the world by God; but on the other, this withdrawal is for the purpose of being equipped for their participation as the people of God in the mission of Christ in the world - '... the reason for the calling out is the sending forth'.<sup>3</sup>

'God's people, in being drawn up into the drama of Christ's saving work, receive the forgiveness and new life which Christ brings. But they are involved also in Christ's self-giving to the world. God's saving acts are for all mankind ... The Church's worship is therefore a thanksgiving, a confession, an intercession and an offering on behalf of all mankind through which the Church participates in Christ's priestly ministry on behalf of the world;

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1. Ibid., p.19.

2. Ibid. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.45.

3. Ibid. The Report cites I Peter 2:9-10.

she is also prepared for her witness and service to all the world, through which she participates in Christ's prophetic and kingly ministry.<sup>1</sup>

The function of the church is ministry, and this ministry is one of worship, witness and service; all of which is undertaken within the ministry and mission of Christ. It is necessary that we notice that the terms 'ministry' and 'mission' were treated by the Commission as equivalents in the important sense that the purpose and nature of the church's ministry is missionary.

The first word of the Joint Commission on the church's function of ministry was that ministry is a function of the whole church. All members of the church are ministers, whether or not they are able to so indicate under the heading 'occupation' on a census poll.

'The whole Church and every member in it, is called to participate in the worshipping, witnessing, serving life of the Church.

The "ministry of the laity" - that is, of the whole people of God - has its initial expression in the sacrament of baptism, has its commission in the rite of confirmation, and is regularly sustained by the sacrament of Holy Communion.<sup>2</sup>

The missionary obligation of the whole church and its every member, the obligation to participate in the ministry of Christ, was heavily underscored in the discussion of the sacraments. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper were treated within the context of their relationship to the church's mission. Definition of the sacraments was by-passed in favour of the affirmation of the significance of the sacraments for

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1. Ibid., pp.19f.

2. Ibid., p.20.



the life of the church.<sup>1</sup> Rather than provide an explanation for their efficacy, the Commission sought to affirm the place of the sacraments within the life of the church as a means by which Christ enlists and equips its members for their participation in his mission.<sup>2</sup>

Baptism was affirmed as 'an initiation into the mission of Christ'.<sup>3</sup> As an act of incorporation into the one Body of Christ, baptism was understood to imply 'the obligation for all believers to share in the life of the one Church and in its mission and service to all the world'.<sup>4</sup> As an initiation into the life of the new age which is expressed in the old age, baptism 'demands from the believer a continuing participation in the servant work of Christ in the world'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, confirmation was seen as related to baptism in that it is a rite by which God's promises, given in baptism, are confirmed to members of the church who are 'sent out into the world to fulfil their ministry'.<sup>6</sup>

The Lord's Supper was also discussed in the context of its relationship to the church's missionary obligation. Selecting five New Testament emphases the Commission affirmed the sacrament as : a 'thanksgiving' by which the church 'offers thanks on behalf of the world, and offers itself in gratitude so that Christ may use His people to make

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1. The distinction between 'definition' and 'affirmation' is of major importance for an understanding of the Reports of the Joint Commission. We will consider this distinction, and its significance for the life and ministry of the Uniting Church in Australia when we discuss the Basis of Union in its final form (1971).
  2. See, e.g., the way in which the problem of infant baptism and the related issue of confirmation practice was discussed on pp.22f, paying special attention to the footnotes on these pages.
  3. Ibid., p.21.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Ibid., p.23. The Commission's discussion of baptism reflected, and often reproduced parts of the Report of Faith and Order's Theological Commission on Baptism which is found in One Lord, One Baptism, SCM Press, London, 1960.

known His saving work to all mankind';<sup>1</sup> a 'commemoration' by which the church is 'continuously provided with the grace to continue in the way marked out by their baptism';<sup>2</sup> a 'communion', setting forth the reconciling power of Christ and thus sending forth 'all believers to share this power in the world through the servant love they receive';<sup>3</sup> an 'anticipation or pledge' of the ultimate victory of Christ, and so sending forth 'those who live within the reality of this sign ... into the world to show the meaning of the Lord's death until He comes';<sup>4</sup> and a 'showing forth', by Christ before the Father of his sacrifice, which draws believers into his saving work and identifies them as a priesthood who 'offer themselves to Him so that their living sacrifice may be taken up into His one sacrifice, and used by Christ in the service of the world'.<sup>5</sup>

The Commission was unequivocal in its insistence that the function of the church, the ministry in which all members participate, is missionary. Not only the church's witness and service, but also its worship is to be understood as being inseparably related to its missionary obligation.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.24. The report cites Mk. 14:23.
  2. Ibid. The Report cites, e.g., 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24. The 'way marked out in baptism' is missionary; cf. preceding paragraph.
  3. Ibid., p.25. The Report cites 1 Cor. 10:16-17.
  4. Ibid. The Report cites Mk. 14:25; 1 Cor. 11:26.
  5. Ibid. The Report cites Heb. 9:24; Col. 1:24; Heb. 10:19-25; 1 Peter 2:4-5; Rom. 12.
  6. Cf. P. S. Minear (ed.), Faith and Order Findings, op. cit., the Report of the Theological Commission on Worship, Part II, p.36, 'The relation of worship to mission'. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.45. discussed the way that the Joint Commission's view, that 'in the Christian life a certain polarity exists between worship and the mission of witness and service', laid the basis for the discussion of ministry in terms of their 'preoccupation with the Church's mission'.

In the view of the Commission, the church exists for the sake of mission. This understanding also included that emphasis be placed on the relationship between the church and the world. The gifts which the church has received are not to be 'grasped' as the possession of the church but shared in the service of others. As Christ existed in history for others, so the church exists for others. As Christ was sent, so the church is sent. As the Lordship of Christ was expressed in servanthood, so the church's life is to be expressed in servanthood. The church is the people of God for the world. The Report described Christ's obedience as 'secular obedience' - an obedience expressed in the whole of life and not confined to some 'religious' compartment of a larger reality. It was argued further that, correspondingly, the ministry of the church must be exercised by the whole church as its members participate in a variety of ways in a particular historical setting:

'moving out in service across all the barriers of human life and in the life of service within the structures of daily life.'<sup>1</sup>

The Commission concluded that this means that the Australian church, asking the question of the form and order of the church, must

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1. Ibid., p.26. This section, 'The Time and Form of Mission', pp.25-27, clearly reflected the influence of Bonhoeffer which we noted above. This emphasis of the Commission must also be seen within the wider context of ecumenical thought. Cf., e.g., W. A. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), The New Delhi Report, op. cit., the Report of the Section on 'Witness', pp.88-90, the Report of the Section on 'Service', pp.93 and 111; P. C. Rodger and L. Vischer (eds.), The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., Report of the Section on 'The Church in the Purpose of God', especially p.44 where the 'secular' character of the church's service is emphasised in the questions put by the Conference; and P. S. Minear (ed.), Faith and Order Findings, op. cit., the Report of the Theological Commission on 'Christ and the Church', Part II, p.56.

begin by paying serious heed to its Australian context. For example, the Australian church must consider the significance of sociological changes for its congregational life and for its structures of ministry and church government. What adjustments in church order are demanded by the Australian phenomena of urbanisation, the growth of suburbia, the separation of home from the place of employment, or the specialisation and institutionalisation of, for example, education, health, commerce, industry and mass media? What changes are required of the Australian church in response to the political, social and ecclesiastical changes in Asia and the Pacific?<sup>1</sup> The Commission affirmed:

'To accept this servant role implies a willingness to receive the shape and form of church life which is appropriate to the world-setting in which the mission is carried on.'<sup>2</sup>

Just as the nature of the church requires that it be expressed in structures which are flexible, the missionary function of the church requires a readiness on the part of the church to adapt its structures according to the contemporary requirements for the fulfilment of its function.

(iv) The set apart ministry in the church's mission

In the Second Report, the Commission argued that the ministry of the church, the fulfilment of which is its raison d'être and participation in which is the duty of its every member, depends upon God's gift of a set apart ministry within the church. It is by this ministry

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, p.27.

2. Ibid.

that the people of God are disciplined, 'i.e. made disciples',<sup>1</sup> for the purpose of effectively performing their servant mission in the world.<sup>2</sup> The Commission observed that the New Testament exhibits no static form of ministry within the earliest church. There is no structural uniformity to be found in the first expressions of ministry. It was argued however that within the great variety of ministerial forms evidenced in the New Testament there could be identified certain 'regular functions' which were performed by those set apart.

'Three such marks of the regulated ministry have well-nigh universal acknowledgement:

- (a) responsibility for preaching and teaching - 'the Word truly preached';
- (b) responsibility for sacraments and liturgical life - 'the Sacraments duly administered';

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1. Ibid., p.27. 'Discipline' is used in this positive sense throughout the Report. It does not mean 'laying down the law', but implies constraint only as it is implied in faithful obedience to the call of Christ. Discipline is enlistment in and equipping for participation in mission.
  2. Cf. P. C. Rodger and L. Vischer (eds.), The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., the Report of the Section on 'The Redemptive Work of Christ and the Ministry of His Church', especially pp.64-69; and W. A. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), The New Delhi Report, op. cit., the Report of the Section on 'Witness', p.88.

- (c) responsibility for pastoral care and order - 'Godly discipline'.<sup>1</sup>

These three functional responsibilities of those set apart, or ordained, to minister within the church were understood by the Commission to be related to the threefold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. Through the set apart ministry Christ is seen to proclaim the Word of God and instruct the church in its implications through his Prophetic office; to establish and nourish the church through his Priestly office; and to lead and discipline the church through his Kingly office. It is through the set apart ministry, fulfilling its threefold responsibility, that Christ equips the church for its participation in his ministry. The function of the

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, p.28. It is well to notice the subtle use made of the traditional 'marks' of the church here. By reproducing them in the context of a discussion of the functional responsibility of the set apart ministry, and by further understanding these functions in terms of their significance for the mission of the church, the Commission had implicitly set forth 'mission' as a 'mark' of the church; not as one 'mark' alongside the others, but as the 'mark' that underlies the rest. Cf. C. Williams, The Church, New Directions in Theology Today, Vol. IV, Lutterworth Press, 1969, pp.15f. Williams argued that between Evanston and New Delhi it was emphasised that 'mission' be added as a mark of the church. Between New Delhi and Uppsala, he argued, the more radical understanding developed that 'The way to a true ecclesiology must be indirect for the church is meant to be not an end in itself but the servant of God's mission in the world' (p.16). Thus 'mission' is not just one mark of the church, but is its central characteristic. On this analysis the Commission was already moving ahead into the new period. Of course they were not alone in this forward movement. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, in his book The Pressure of Our Common Calling, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1959, issued in preparation for the WSCF conference in Strasbourg 1960, had already argued that the church's functions of marturia, diakonia and koinonia are in fact aspects of mission and linked to the threefold office of Christ (pp.28f). He wrote, 'It should be explained that we do not use the term 'mission' for one aspect of the calling of the Church because we believe that it has to do with the whole calling of the Church' (p.29).

set apart ministry is to facilitate the fulfilment of the church's missionary function of worship, witness and service.<sup>1</sup>

For the Commission, this had a twofold implication. On the one hand, the church is dependent on these ministerial functions since they are Christ's gift to the people of God through which he calls, establishes, maintains and leads the church as the people of God in the world. On the other hand, this gift of a set apart ministry cannot be segregated from the many ministries which are given to the church since all such gifts come from the one Christ, are gifts of the one Spirit, and are responsible to one another in that they serve the one mission of Christ in the world.<sup>2</sup> The ordering of the church and its ministry must express the homogeneity of the mission to which it is called and for which it is equipped by Christ.

'It follows that the order of the Church must provide for the setting apart of 'ordained' ministries; but must also provide for effective inter-relationship between 'ordained' and 'lay' ministries.'<sup>3</sup>

The manner in which 'ordained' ministers exercise their functions is conditioned by the needs identified within the 'lay' ministry.

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1. This understanding of the relationship between the functions of the set apart ministry and the church within the ministry of Christ was also expressed at the Montreal Conference : P. C. Rodger and L. Vischer (eds.), The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., p.64, paragraph 89.
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.28f. The Report cites Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12; and Rom. 12. Cf. W. A. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), The New Delhi Report, op. cit., the Report of the Section on 'Witness', p.88, paragraph 33, where this inter-relationship of ministries was emphasised.
  3. Ibid., p.29.

If the function of the former can be summarised as the building up and equipment of the church for its life and mission as the people of God (Eph. 4:11f.), then it follows that, as the expression of that life and mission is conditioned by the historical context of the church, so too the way in which the functions of ordained ministry are exercised will be subject to modification according to the particular situation. The 'effective inter-relationship between 'ordained' and 'lay' ministries' is vital if they are each to properly fulfil their function within the total mission of Christ.

Before considering the forms which ministries might properly take, the Commission found it necessary to develop an understanding of the foundations of the ministry. The manner in which the functions of service are performed depends on the way their basis is perceived. In this discussion the work of Jean-Louis Leuba<sup>1</sup> proved to be of considerable help to the commissioners, and its influence can be clearly seen in their Report.

Leuba argued that when the modern church looks back to its foundations in the New Testament it needs to recognise that the account given there of the story of Christ, the apostles and the early church is permeated by an essential dualism. This dualism may be first

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1. J.-L. Leuba, New Testament Pattern - An Exegetical Enquiry Into The 'Catholic' And 'Protestant' Dualism, translated by H. Knight, Lutterworth Press, London, 1953. I am indebted to George Yule and Colin Williams for indicating the importance of this book for their work on the Drafting Committee. Cf. also C. Williams, op. cit., pp.108f. where Williams links Leuba's analysis with the Joint Commission's efforts to develop an appropriate and effective form of ministry for the Australian church. Leuba's book had almost no influence in other ecumenical discussions, the exception being that Max Thurian gives it attention in his Priesthood and Ministry, Mowbray, 1983. Indeed, Colin Williams recalled in conversation that it was through their contact with Thurian in Switzerland that he and George Yule came to know of Leuba's work.



identified in the titles given to Christ. On the one hand, Leuba saw a set of 'institutional' titles which reflected a conception of Jesus as being in continuity with the structures of Israel : Son of David, King of Israel. On the other hand, he identified a set of 'spiritual' titles reflecting the newness of Christ's life and ministry as an intervention of God in history : Son of Man, Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Leuba summarised the basis of his thesis:

'The difference between the two points of view may be interpreted as follows : on the one hand, immanent continuity; on the other, transcendent dynamic power. On the one hand, a divine work founded in the being of Jesus; on the other, a divine work ever bursting forth afresh in the initiatives which God constantly renews and Jesus constantly accepts in the spirit of obedience. On the one hand, we have the horizontality of a carnal, national, racial, and dynastic tradition; on the other, the verticality of ever-new divine interventions, culminating in the Resurrection.'<sup>2</sup>

The Christological duality which Leuba identified was actually, therefore, a duality in the manner of God's saving activity. On the one hand, the faithfulness of God is found in the continuity of the 'horizontal'; on the other, the faithfulness of God is found in the immediate, 'vertical', action of God who 'constantly confirms, by ever-renewed action, His fidelity to His promises'.<sup>3</sup> The unity of the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' in the person of Christ is also to be found within the whole body of the apostles. Leuba saw this dualism expressed in the 'institutional' authority of the Twelve and the

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1. J.-L. Leuba, op. cit., pp.9-12.

2. Ibid., p.19.

3. Ibid., p.20.

'charismatic' authority of Paul.<sup>1</sup> Correspondingly, Leuba insisted that the origins of the first church, i.e. the church which included both the Jerusalem and Gentile churches, had a twofold character which contained both an 'institution' which would receive converts, and the 'event' of the emergence of converts who would later form an institution.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, he argued that an institutional/charismatic dualism vis-à-vis ministry could be identified in the contrast between Mathias and Paul, in the manner of their commissioning as apostles 'after the event'.<sup>3</sup>

For Leuba, the important thing about the dualism which characterised the body of apostles, and the early church, was that it was not contained in one person, as it was with Christ, but 'in the union and the living fellowship of them all'.<sup>4</sup> The two aspects of God's fidelity were held together in the Twelve's acceptance of the authority of Paul, and in Paul's acceptance of the authority of the Twelve. Similarly in the church, the acceptance of the Gentile church by Jerusalem (through the circumcision debate) and the acceptance of the Jerusalem church by the Gentile Christians (through the Pauline collection) exemplified the way in which the dualism of 'institution' and 'event' must be held together for the fulfilment of each.<sup>5</sup> Leuba therefore maintained:

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1. Ibid., p.68.
  2. Ibid., p.103.
  3. Ibid., pp.107-110.
  4. Ibid., p.68.
  5. Ibid., p.126.

'But institution and event, these two aspects of God's work of salvation, although distinct are not separate nor in conflict with each other. They are united, mutually fulfilling, and flow both of them from the same divine will. The institution without the event would be comparable to a series of zeros. The event without the institution would be no more than a 'one'. By the constant combination of the two factors, God puts the 'one' of the event before the zeros of the institution. The former immediately gives currency to the latter. But reciprocally the latter provide for the former a subject on which to work : the vast and rich significance deposited in the institution.'<sup>1</sup>

Mindful of Leuba's analysis, the Commission expressed the view that the 'duality' of the church, which they had already discussed in terms of the way in which the church lives with reference both to what has been given and what has been promised in Christ, is paralleled by a 'two-sided' character in the church's ministry. On the one hand the ministry of the church bears witness to what has already been done; the completed work of Christ. On the other hand its ministry must bear witness to the fact that until the consummation of the rule of Christ the historical forms which mediate his Lordship do so imperfectly and are therefore subject to modification.

'... for Christ is the Lord of the Church who comes to us not only out of the past, but out of the future, directing us to new obedience and service.'<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the Commission argued that the foundation of the ministry on the work and teaching of the apostles gives the church's ministry a two-sided character. The apostolic nature of the church's

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1. Ibid., p.128.

2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.29.

mission includes constancy in the character of its continuing witness to the givenness of the faith, and multiformity in its responses to the demands of witness and service in a changing world.<sup>1</sup>

'But the true life of the Church depends upon her ministers being open to the future as well as tied to the past. It is only as she lives by her tradition that she fulfils her mission; and it is only as she fulfils her mission that she adheres to her tradition.'<sup>2</sup>

Whereas Leuba had been suggesting that it is given to some to be 'institutional' ministers and to others to be 'charismatic' ministers, the former 'appointed' and the latter 'recognised',<sup>3</sup> and that these contrasting types compliment one another's ministry, the Commission implied that the ministers in the united church should be both institutional and charismatic - loyal to the institution and open to the event of God's saving work.

'The tension between these aspects, which came close to a breaking point in the New Testament, has reached the breaking point at later times. The existence of our churches witnesses to that. As we look back on these breaks, we may discern different aspects of continuing apostolic life in the divided parts of the Church; but the picture of the apostolate here presented should drive us back towards that unity of life in which we are

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1. Cf. Chapter Two, Section I, Subsection (iv), of this paper where we described as 'apostolic' the dynamic of 'confessing'. In the section of the Second Report which we are presently considering the Commission said of Paul: 'No one stresses more than he what has been received or handed on ... But the newness of Paul's call led to real tension as he had to struggle for the recognition of his call against a conservative understanding of authority which was tempted not to recognise the signs of Christ's presence where these constituted a challenge to set ways ...', *Ibid.*, pp.30f.
  2. *Ibid.*, p.30.
  3. J.-L. Leuba, *op. cit.*, p.109.

granted the fullness of continuity with the past, and are prepared for that true openness to the future which will enable us to be servants of Christ in His mission towards the ends of space and the end of time.'<sup>1</sup>

It was later in the Report that the Commission showed itself to be open to Leuba's more difficult challenge of providing for the possibility of a 'living fellowship' between the 'catholic' type and 'protestant' type of church and ministry.<sup>2</sup> At this stage they sought to insist that the set apart ministry, being founded on the ministry of Christ and the apostles, must be both in continuity with the past (the institution of God's saving work) and open to the future (the event of God's saving work) if it is to facilitate the church's participation in the mission of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

(v) Summary

In the following Section of this chapter we will discuss the recommendations of the Commission concerning the form which the church and ministry might take to express obedience to the missionary call of Christ in that time and place. It is worthwhile at this point, however, to summarize the central convictions which the Commission had already set forth. We may isolate six such affirmations which were suggestive of the later recommendations.

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.31.
  2. Leuba envisaged this 'living fellowship' in terms of the 'mutual recognition' of ministries being sought in the Faith and Order movement. Colin Williams has indicated to me that he and George Yule doubted whether 'mutual recognition' actually meant very much in practical terms, and so they saw Leuba's 'living fellowship' in terms of a genuinely united ministry. The proposals for a Concordat with the CSI (see below) were one outworking of this perspective.
  3. This understanding finds more explicit support in Schweizer, op. cit., e.g. pp.204f, than in Leuba; though taken in the context of the Report as a whole it accords more with the view of the latter than would at this stage appear.

(a) The church's function of worship, witness and service are a participation in the threefold ministry of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King; and in purpose and nature this ministry of the church is missionary.

(b) By nature and function the church is oriented, not only to God, but also towards the world. This 'worldly' orientation is an expression of the church's obedience to the example and call of its Lord and of its participation in Christ's servant mission in the world.

(c) The ministry of the church is the function of the whole church and of its every member. Through the worship and sacraments of the church every member is enlisted in and equipped for active engagement in ministry; for service in Christ's mission.

(d) For the sake of this participation the church is given a set apart ministry, the purpose of which is to facilitate Christ's enlistment and equipment of the church for his servant mission.

(e) Without a genuine, dynamic inter-relationship of the 'ordained' and 'lay' ministries neither can fulfil their function within the total mission of Christ.

(f) While the set apart ministry must express continuity with the past, be bound to the givenness of the Faith and loyal to the 'institution' of the history of God's saving work, the missionary purpose of the church requires also that its ministers be open to the call of Christ to witness and service in a changing world such that they and the church may respond in 'new forms of obedience'.

We noted at the beginning of this Section that McCaughey reported that the Commission suppressed its 'natural' inclination, to move directly from the doctrinal agreement in its First Report to a statement on sacraments and ministry, and decided rather to discuss these within the wider context of the nature and function of the church. This was a 'logical consequence' of the methodological decisions previously taken. We may now further comment that this also intimated the Commission's preoccupation with what we might call the 'functional significance' of the sacraments and ministry. We saw that the Commission did not seek to provide a doctrinal definition of the sacraments but, rather, concentrated on the significance of the sacraments for the life of the church in facilitating Christ's enlistment and equipment of its members in and for his mission. Similarly, as they began to consider the set apart ministry within the whole ministry of the church, they were not as interested in providing a doctrinal definition of the set apart ministry as in affirming the significance of that ministry for the life of the church. Though it becomes clear later in the Report that the Commission accepted a 'functional' view of ministry, their interest was not in what differentiates 'ordained' from 'lay' ministry, be it functional or ontological, but in the purpose of this differentiation. The Commission was led by its missiological preoccupation to set forth, not so much a doctrine of ministry, but an affirmation of the functional significance of the set apart ministry within the missionary church.

We have seen that the Commission had been appropriating for its own instruction and use the findings of the ecumenical movement; particularly of the Faith and Order Commission between Lund and Montreal and, more generally, of the World Council between Evanston and New

Delhi. Our specific references to Schweizer, Bonhoeffer and Leuba, as well as our recognition of the continuing influence of Barth, need to be seen within this ecumenical context.<sup>1</sup> In their deliberations up to this stage of the Second Report the Commission had been largely affirming what may be seen as the 'ecumenical consensus' of the time.<sup>2</sup> In what followed, however, the Commission was required to do what the World Council had not done, and indeed could not do, namely, to apply this newly developed ecclesiological understanding to the very concrete task of ordering a particular church in a particular time and place. The Commission had reached a point where they faced the opportunity, the responsibility, and the difficult task of giving concrete form to what had been 'merely' the musing of theologians.

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1. The extent of this appropriation was such that for us to have listed and discussed every concept, construction and phrase having its origin or parallel in the Reports of the Faith and Order Commission or of the Sections of Montreal or New Delhi would have been pedantic. I would therefore again draw the reader's attention to the footnotes of the present Section where we have noted in summary the central correlations between the Report of the Joint Commission and statements from the ecumenical movement.
  2. Cf. C. Williams, op. cit., pp.13-16, where he provides a brief description of the developments in the ecclesiological consensus in the ecumenical movement.



### Section Three

The Second Report of the Joint Commission on Church  
Union : The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering  
(1963). Part Two : The Proposals on Ministry.

- (i) The fourth 'critical decision'
- (ii) Continuity and flexibility - the historical precedent
- (iii) Organizing ministry for mission
  - (a) Episcopate in the congregation
  - (b) Episcopate beyond the congregation
  - (c) The Concordat with the Church of South India
- (iv) The 'Reservation'

(i) The fourth 'critical decision'

In the previous section of this paper we remarked on the surprising, though certainly 'logical', continuity between the two Reports of the Joint Commission on Church Union. At the risk of pedantry, it is necessary that we recognise once more the consistency of the Commission's reporting as they began to set forth their proposals for the ordering of the united church in anticipation of the inclusion of these recommendations in the Proposed Basis of Union.

In his paper of 1965, Davis McCaughey organised his discussion of the union negotiations and the Proposed Basis of Union around what he called 'four critical decisions'. We have already discussed the way in which the first three of these methodological decisions were implemented: that priority be given to questions of faith and order; that union must be approached 'according to the rhythm of the Gospel'; and that 'consideration of the Church, its nature, function and mission should precede that of the ministry'. That the Commission's proposals for the ordering of the church were in continuity with their previous discussion, and that these proposals, though logically consequent to their earlier work, were not the sorts of recommendations union negotiators would instinctively make was underscored by McCaughey's fourth 'critical decision'.

'The fourth critical decision was simply to hold firmly to the previous three decisions when we came to discuss the ministry. Proposals put forward about the ministry cannot therefore be understood in themselves but in the context of the discussion which was already taking place.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.46.

The methodological approach adopted in 1957 was not a sort of 'slippery slope' down which the commissioners slid inevitably and dangerously to the proposals of 1963. Rather, to pursue the analogy, it was the reverse. In 1957 the Commission took the first steps in a difficult (and in a different sense 'dangerous') climb towards a summit which could only be reached as they resolved to 'hold firmly' and deliberately to the path which they had chosen. The only inevitability in adopting critical ecclesiology as the method of negotiating a church union, was that the consistent pursuit of this process would inevitably challenge at least some of the instinctive ecclesiological responses engendered by habit and narrow tradition. The fourth 'critical decision' which McCaughey identified reflected both that the path which the Commission had chosen was difficult and that the proposals which were ultimately put forward were the result of the deliberate and careful acceptance of the challenge arising from the Commission's methodology. The proposals were in no sense accidental or thoughtlessly 'trendy'; they were consciously and conscientiously developed.

The proposals concerning the ordering of ministry in the united church were the most surprising, and naturally controversial, fruits of the Commission's negotiations. But it must be recognised that it was signalled from the outset, by the adoption of a methodology of critical ecclesiology, that in keeping its options open to consider the unexpected call of God the Commission was likely to produce recommendations which might be disturbing in their novelty.

(ii) Continuity and flexibility - the historical precedent

Having discussed in general terms the functions and foundations of the church's ministry and of the set apart ministry within the church,

the Commission went on to consider the form which ordained ministry might take in the church after union.

Though it is not necessary for our purposes to detail the argumentation of the Report, which reflected what were by then well accepted findings of New Testament and Patristic scholarship,<sup>1</sup> it is worthwhile to note what the Commission identified as the manner in which the early church gave form to set apart ministry. The Commission concluded that the offices of presbuteros, episcopos and diaconos, which they found to be identifiable even in New Testament churches, were not clearly defined or functionally distinguished until the fourth century. Even at this time, they argued, these functions of ministry found a relatively final form of expression only as a response to the ecclesiastical turmoil of the day; not as the result of the discovery of an essential ontological differentiation unknown to the earliest church.

'We conclude that it is proper to speak of one order of ministry in the early period, or of flexibility of orders within the one ministry. Differences of function arose in the struggle against schism and were finally solidified by custom and canon law into different orders within the one order.'<sup>2</sup>

It was for the sake of the church's unity in life and teaching, 'in time and space', that it rallied around the figure of the bishop and eventually regularised the form of episcopal succession. The clear differentiation of functions of ministry is properly understood as having been occasioned by the needs of the church. The differentiation was functional, not ontological, and was made within a single order of

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.33-36.

2. Ibid., p.36.

ministry. It was the means by which the church organised ministry such that it might be most effectively and appropriately exercised. This activity of the church was seen as being operative also during the period of the Reformation as the Reformers sought guidance from the New Testament and Patristic periods. It was with this perspective that the Commission wished the uniting churches to see their Protestant traditions of ministerial organisation.

While observing the well known and popularly rehearsed Reformation conviction of the parity of ministers - that there is only one order of ministry, the distinction between episcopal, presbyterial and diaconal ministry being functional and not essential - the Commission reminded its readers that this did not cause the first generation of Reformers to deny the validity and utility of the episcopal function, but only to dispute its monarchical and political expression. This latter observation was of course by no means unknown, but was not popularly emphasised.

'Although the Reformers believed that bishops and presbyters were essentially one order, it was not their desire to abolish episcopacy. This conclusion from the doctrine of the parity of ministers did not come until the second generation of Reformers - particularly Beza, Cartwright and Melville. In their insistence on restoring godly discipline and the sovereignty of the Word, the Reformers simply demanded the bishops be no longer primarily politicians and administrators, but pastors and teachers, and the non-Anglican reformers stressed that they should exercise the personal episcopate within the corporate episcopate of the presbytery and the Assembly.'<sup>1</sup>

Particular attention was paid to the Scottish institution of 'superintendents'. It was argued that these were set apart to fulfil

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1. Ibid., p.37.

an episcopal function, but were so designated by Knox to distinguish them from the Roman bishops whose office was of a political nature.<sup>1</sup> It was observed that these 'reformed bishops' were only replaced by the Presbyterian system as a result of the State's interference in the appointment of bishops and 'the teaching of Andrew Melville'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly the Commission observed that 'more often than not' for more than a century thereafter in the Church of Scotland a form of personal episcopate was exercised together with the corporate episcopate of the presbytery by means of a bishop-in-presbytery.

In its historical study the Commission illustrated the way in which the organisation of the set apart ministry over the centuries was marked by both continuity and flexibility. Continuity in that the function of ministry needed to be exercised within the church at all times and in all places, and flexibility in that this function was given a variety of forms according to the needs and circumstances of the church in various times and places. Though the set apart ministry is a 'given', the ordering of that ministry is an activity of the church. The essential function of ministry is God's gift, but it is the church's responsibility to attend to the organisation of ministry such that its function is most effectively and appropriately fulfilled. The church is not absolved of this responsibility by the fact of tradition, since that fact is always secondary to and the servant of the primary 'fact' of the Gospel and the accompanying missionary obligation.

Commenting on this part of the Commission's Report, Norman Young identified the basic issue in their deliberations on the form of ordained ministry.

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1. Ibid., p.38.

2. Ibid., pp.38f. Though the content of this teaching was not mentioned.

'Since ... it is impossible to answer the question "What structure should there be to the ordained ministry?" by tracing a fixed pattern in the New Testament or early Church, or by following an unequivocal lead from the practice of the Reformers, the starting point must be the given function of the ministry. Then the question of which pattern best serves this function can be raised.'<sup>1</sup>

In the first centuries of the church's life ministry was organised around the bishop, and the form of episcopal succession was regularised, to meet the church's need for oversight. In the sixteenth century episcopacy was reformed in some places so that it might continue to fulfil this function. By the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries many reformed churches had entirely replaced personal with corporate forms of episcopate, again that this function of ministry might be fulfilled. Implicit in the Commission's historical study was the understanding that the uniting churches too had a responsibility to attend to the organisation of ministry such that its function might be most effectively and appropriately fulfilled. The question implied was whether, on the occasion of their union, the uniting churches might need to reorganise their forms of ministry on a model derived, not from the amalgamation of the three existing forms, but from the needs of the missionary church.

The Commission's conviction that the missionary needs of the church should condition the way in which ministry is given form was not without parallel in ecumenical discussions at that time. For example at Montreal, according to David M. Paton, there was the beginning of a

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1. Norman Young, 'The Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia', The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XVIII, July 1966, No.3, p.326.

'... recovery of the sense that the Church, the ministry, and the congregation are all alike in basic principle missionary, though much of the structure which we have inherited from the past makes it difficult to practise this principle and act on it.'<sup>1</sup>

The need to give priority to the demand for missionary obedience in the discussion of the ministry was emphasised by the Chairman of the Section on 'The Redemptive Work of Christ and the Ministry of the Church' (who happened to be Davis McCaughey) in his introduction of the Section's draft Report to the Conference.

'Dr. McCaughey also drew attention to the importance of the discussion on the special ministry, which Faith and Order could no longer ignore. Many member churches were involved in actual union negotiations and Faith and Order should be in a position to help them as they might request. But we must also reckon with a widespread loss of nerve about the ministry. We needed to work together at a doctrine of the ministry which was less a matter of controversy and more a stimulus to obedience.'<sup>2</sup>

By reminding the uniting churches of their history with regard to polity the Commission showed that their generation did not receive an immutable form of ministry though its function and foundations remained constant. It could not be assumed that the united church would simply merge the the ministries of the uniting churches without any substantial alteration of their form. In particular the Commission was laying the foundations for an argument for the historical threefold ministry as a suitable model from which a new and more appropriate and effective form of ministry might be developed. In his article concerning the discussion and proposals of the Joint Commission, to which we have already

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1. The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., p.26.

2. Ibid., p.27.



referred, Davis McCaughey described their perspective on the relationship between the function and form of the ministry.

'In the Uniting Church ... we suggest that we should go into our task with bishops, presbyters and deacons, our order re-ordered so as to take account of all that God has already taught us, but also with this tradition of the Church held in a state of fluidity. The operation of these offices in the future will be as subtly or as radically different as the context in which the Church's eternal message is to be proclaimed will be subtly or radically different from the past. The order of the Church will at once bear witness to the Gospel, the given message, and to the changing circumstances of men's lives. This ought not to result in conflict, for the Gospel itself speaks of the redemption of men's lives. It would have the Church move in to the places where men are.'<sup>1</sup>

The way in which the Commission treated the historical material is important for an understanding of their view of the place of historical precedent in an ecclesiological discussion. And certainly they were very concerned with historical precedent, in spite of the impression gained in some quarters after the publication of the Second Report that they were 'casting to the wind' the valued heritage of the past. But the Commission dealt with the historical material in an interesting way. Given that they were about to include provision for a form of episcopacy in their Proposed Basis of Union, it might have been expected that they would have presented the evidence concerning the retention of the episcopal function by the first generation of Reformers in an interested, perhaps partisan, fashion. But this was not the approach they took.

It is significant that the Commission did not present the historical evidence in such a way as to argue that the uniting churches'

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1. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., pp.49f.

Reformation heritage somehow 'demanded' the reintroduction of a form of episcopacy. Of course this would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. So perhaps it is even more important that they did not seek to provide grounds for the revival of the particular form of episcopacy instituted, for example, by the Church of Scotland under the influence of Knox.<sup>1</sup> The historical precedent of real importance lay elsewhere.

The 'binding' precedent, in the view of the Commission was not that of particular forms which the church has given to ministry from time to time and place to place, but that of the dynamic by which the church has responded to the call of Christ by finding 'new forms of obedience' suitable to the demands of mission in its time and place. In a sense, that those forms of obedience were those of episcopacy, reformed episcopacy or corporate episcopate is incidental. The important thing is that they were truly forms of obedience. Historical continuity is properly maintained only in so far as the church continues to accept its responsibility to find forms to express obedience to the call of Christ. It was to this dynamic continuity of obedience that the Commission believed the uniting churches were being called.

(iii) Organising ministry for mission

In their discussion of the nature of the 'reformed exercise of personal episcopate' of the sixteenth century, the Commission pointed out that none of the Reformers would accept that 'a political and ceremonial

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1. In seeking a suitable model of episcopacy for the Australian situation they found the historically and geographically more relevant model of the CSI most suggestive. But even here the CSI model was treated as suggestive only - to be emulated perhaps, but not imitated.

succession', to use Knox's phrase, may be made the sine qua non of the true church. Apostolic succession is maintained in the whole life of the church, not in a separate life of the episcopate. In the Commission's words:

'Succession in ministerial order is good; succession in apostolic faith and life is essential.'<sup>1</sup>

The church is served but not constituted by the set apart ministry within it. It is not the existence of a certain form of ministry that ensures that the church is maintained in apostolic succession, though it is the function of the set apart ministry to facilitate the church's continuing participation in the 'apostolic faith and life'.<sup>2</sup> With this understanding the Commission affirmed that, for the sake of the participation and continuance of the whole church in the apostolic 'faith, doctrine, order and mission', God has given the church a set apart ministry of the Word, Sacraments and Pastoral Care. To this ministry belong certain permanent functions, namely:

'... the personal exercise of oversight (episcopate) in relation to the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments and the pastoral care of the people, and the provision for the perpetuation of this ministry through the rite of ordination.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.40.

2. Cf. Section II(iv) of the present Chapter where we observed that the Commission had implicitly affirmed 'mission' as the central mark of the church in relation to which the traditional marks of the church are to be interpreted. The 'true' church is the missionary church. This is the organising principle of the Commission's ecclesiology. 'Apostolic faith and life' is therefore best understood as being descriptive of the character of the missionary church.

3. Ibid.

The reciprocity between the set apart ministry and the missionary church was emerging as the central truth for the Commission's deliberations and eventual recommendations on church order : that the relationship of mutuality, by which the needs of the people of God exercising their given, apostolic mission in the world condition the form in which the set apart ministry exercise their given, apostolic function among the people of God, must be determinative of the ordering of church and ministry. Apostolic succession is maintained in the faith and life of the whole church by this dynamic of mutuality in the service of Christ. There is no formal mechanism by which apostolicity might be maintained, only the relationship between the set apart ministry and the missionary church whereby the whole people of God seeks to answer the call of Christ with the response of obedience in their time and place. The Commission's intention was to propose a form of ministry for the united church which would not subvert but only serve this apostolic dynamic.

The Commission settled on the term 'episcope' to designate the central characteristic of the ministerial function. They saw this 'oversight' as having both personal and corporate dimensions. Since God's saving work is accomplished in the person of Jesus, they argued, it follows that it is not by 'a code of law or a Church court but by an apostolic man' that the gospel is primarily mediated.<sup>1</sup> The gospel is presented personally. But since this apostolic commission and function is not held by one person in isolation from the apostolic community of the people of God, the corporate aspect of episcopy must also be acknowledged. It was argued by way of example that the minister in a

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1. Ibid. The Report cites Gal. 4:14, 1 Thess. 2:13, and 2 Cor. 5:20.

congregation, though exercising personal episcopate in relation to the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments and the pastoral care of the people, participates also in the corporate episcopate of the congregation which is exercised in the congregational meeting or by representative members. The reciprocity between the set apart ministry and the missionary church is paralleled by the interplay between personal and corporate episcopate.

As if to underline their determination to give a priority to this important reciprocity and interplay, the Commission went on to address in an interesting way the matter of the form which set apart ministry might take such that episcopate might be fulfilled. Rather than set a heading such as 'The Ordained Ministry' under which could be discussed, for example, 'Deacons', 'Presbyters' and 'Bishops', the Commission took a different tack. They provided as subject headings 'Episcopate in the Congregation' and 'Episcopate Beyond the Congregation' and proceeded to describe how the function of episcopate, in its personal and corporate dimensions, might be provided for in the ordering of ministry. Under the former heading, therefore, was not only the discussion of 'Presbyters' and of 'Deacons', but also of 'The Congregation'. This indirect approach to the subject of set apart ministry was demanded by the desire to deal directly with the central issue in church order, namely, that the ordering of the church be facilitative of its missionary function so that it might be maintained in the 'apostolic faith and life' and that, to this end, episcopate be given proper and effective expression.

(a) Episcope in the congregation

The responsibility of the minister of the Word and Sacraments was understood as being that of episcopate or oversight. The Commission preferred the designation 'presbyter' to that of 'minister'. Their rationale for this was that the biblical term 'presbyter' was less general and emphasised by implication that the ministry of the church is the responsibility of its whole membership and that within this one ministry there is a differentiation of offices. It should also be remembered that in the Church of South India, and in the schemes of union proposed for Ceylon and for North India and Pakistan the decision had also been taken to employ the term 'presbyter' in preference to 'minister'. These schemes of union had been carefully scrutinized by the Australian negotiators.

The Commission described seven duties of the presbyter:

- '(1) Preaching the Word, and building up members in their most holy faith; striving to bring sinners to repentance both by the public and private exercise of his ministry and proclaiming the forgiveness of sins; encouraging and giving full scope to the exercise by church members of their various ministries in the Church; and forwarding all efforts directed to the establishment of righteousness and the removal of wrong in the community.
- (2) Teaching and baptizing; instructing the young and preparing candidates for Confirmation and for admission to communicant membership.
- (3) Using every opportunity to preach the gospel to non-Christians and to bring men to the obedience of faith.
- (4) Leading the worship, administering Holy Communion and conducting the other services of the Church; and acting as intercessor for the people committed to his care.
- (5) Watching over the flock of Christ; visiting the people, especially the sick and erring; with authority to teach, to warn, to rebuke and to encourage;

and maintaining the doctrine and discipline of the Church with all fidelity.

(6) Taking his share in the government of the Church.

(7) To these ends, being diligent in private study and prayer.<sup>1</sup>

Although their description of the responsibilities of the presbyter was generally reflective of traditional Protestant statements of the duties of the ordained minister,<sup>2</sup> it was more directly derived from the Asian schemes mentioned above.<sup>3</sup> In particular it followed closely

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1. Ibid., pp.41f.
  2. Such statements are often preserved in the Ordinal as variously set down by the denominations. Cf. e.g. The Book of Offices, 'being the Orders of Service authorised for use in the Methodist Church together with The Order for Morning Prayer', Methodist Publishing House, London, pp.144-145. They are also transmitted in such works on Doctrine which are counted trustworthy (either formally or informally) within a communion, e.g. A Manual of Church Doctrine According to the Church of Scotland, H. J. Wotherspoon and J. M. Kirkpatrick, revised and enlarged by T. F. Torrance and Ronald Selby Wright, Oxford University Press, London, 1960, pp.73 and 72-79. This volume was cited with approval by the Commission. Cf. also the 'Blue Book', published for the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1963, pp.752-755 : 'Statement on the Christian Ministry' prepared by the Panel on Doctrine. Published at the same time as the Commission's Second Report, the statement is an example of the transmission of a traditional description of ordained ministry, but with such emphases as demanded by the contemporary needs of the church. The Commission's discussion, on the other hand, stands out as being more fully synchronous with the life of the church in a particular place in the second half of the twentieth century.
  3. Cf. The Constitution of the Church of South India (with amendments up to 31st December, 1951, together with the Basis of Union adopted by the Governing Bodies of the Uniting Churches in India and elsewhere), The Christian Literature Society for India, Madras et al., 1952, pp.30f and 74-76; The Church of South India - The Book of Common Worship, Oxford University Press, London et al., 1963, pp.168-170 ('The Examination' from 'The Ordination of Presbyters'); Proposed Scheme of Church Union in Ceylon, published for The Negotiating Committee, by The United Society for Christian Literature, Madras and Colombo, 1949, pp.16, 36f, and 86-89; Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan, Third Revised Edition, published for The Negotiating Committee, by The Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1957, pp.11, 15 and 55.

the seven-point statement of 'The Duties of Presbyters' formulated for the Ceylonese scheme.<sup>1</sup> Apart from incidental differences in wording, and the inclusion of the governmental responsibility of the sixth point, the only deviation from the Ceylonese statement was in the order in which duties were arranged. Of most significance was the Australians' decision to include the responsibility of facilitating members' ministries and promoting righteousness in the community in their first point (a duty placed sixth in the Ceylonese statement).<sup>2</sup>

As well as the obvious implication, that the Commission meeting more than a decade later and in a different country found it important to give a greater priority to members' ministries and to the presbyter's duty to the wider community, this decision can be seen to indicate a certain understanding of the place of the presbyter's ministry within the ministry of the whole church. Following the South India example, the Commission described the responsibility of the presbyter to proclaim the gospel in such a way as to affirm that this ministry of the Word could only be properly seen within the context of the whole church's ministry of worship, witness and service. They affirmed, not just that the responsibility to facilitate the witness of the church through the exercise of members' ministries demands a certain priority, nor just that the duty of leading the church to service in the world through the removal of wrong and the promotion of righteousness in the wider community warrants attention of the first order. But in holding

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1. Scheme of Church Union in Ceylon, op. cit., pp.36f.

2. These duties had similarly been combined in 'The Duties of Presbyters' set forth in The Constitution of the Church of South India, op. cit., pp.30f, point (2).



these together with the charge to preach the Word and proclaim the gospel, the inseparability of these duties was affirmed as different aspects of one, three-fold, responsibility. In no sense can the presbyter's ministry be properly understood or exercised in isolation from the one ministry of the missionary church.

As if to emphasise further their conviction of the essential inter-relatedness of 'ordained' and 'lay' ministry, the Commission indicated that their seven-point description of the presbyter's duty was to be understood as the necessary 'basic ministry of the Word and Sacraments'<sup>1</sup> which might take new forms according to developments in the form of congregational life. Here again was the acknowledgement that though it is 'given' that there be such a ministry in the church, the presbyterate has no life separate from the life of the missionary church within which it functions. The episcopate for which the presbyter is set apart cannot be exercised from 'above', in seclusion from, the congregation - it is 'oversight' exercised from within the missionary church. To employ a rather limited analogy, the presbyter is more like a 'captain-coach' than one who directs the team from the sidelines.

Describing further their perspective, the Commission observed that the structure of the congregation had been almost exclusively related to the residential locale of its membership. They saw this as being open to reform given the separation of the home and the day to day activities of work, education, health and recreation. The Commission argued that forms of congregational life ought to be developed which would provide the presence of the Christian fellowship not only near

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function, and Ordering, op. cit., p.42.

the home but also in 'those crucial places where decisions are made, energies expended and attachments formed'.<sup>1</sup> The ministry of the whole church must be exercised within the totality of life and so congregational structures must be able to facilitate this inclusiveness by new endeavour in newly emerged social structures. Such flexibility in forms of congregational life calls for a corresponding flexibility in the presbyterate which serves the ministry of the whole church.

'Since the rise of new forms of the congregation would require new forms of the presbyterate to provide for their oversight, we must take care that the order of the Church remains sufficiently flexible and open to allow these needs to be met.'<sup>2</sup>

The episcopal responsibility of the presbyter is coextensive with the missionary responsibility of those in her care. Each new demand on the ministry of the people includes a correlative demand on the presbyter's responsibility of oversight.

Having described how the congregation is served by the personal exercise of episcopate by the presbyter, the Commission went on to discuss the functioning of a corporate episcopate within the congregation. In the Commission's view there is a continuing relationship between personal and corporate episcopate which, at the congregational level, means between the presbyter and the congregation.

The gathered congregation was seen as the characteristic expression of the life of the church. The church in one region, maintaining fellowship with other regional churches, was understood to embody the fulness of the church's life:<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.43. The report cites I Cor. 1:2.

'Provided we see that the "region" in which such congregations are formed, is today not only the place where people reside but also other sociological units in which they gather for important activities and decisions, this is still as true as ever.'<sup>1</sup>

The Commission saw the congregation as being called:

'... to recognise each other as loved creatures, and to allow God in Christ to break down every barrier that divides, so that they may participate in, and show to the world, the unity of their life in the family of God.'<sup>2</sup>

Given the significance of the fact of the congregation's life and its call to develop, and witness through, the quality of its common life, the Commission argued that the congregation as a body has 'certain powers of initiative and discipline' and 'certain responsibilities for service and evangelism'. In relation to this the Commission saw the

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1. Ibid. In later years it might have been asked whether this was a reference to gatherings of Christians which are not formally constituted as 'congregations' of a particular denomination, e.g. the gathering of Christians in an office, factory or university who meet for fellowship, worship, study and to prepare for mission in their particular place of work, perhaps served by a chaplain employed by one or another denomination. The reference in a footnote (ibid.) to the significance of groups like the Iona Community, and the influence of theologians such as Eduard Schweizer, noted in the preceding Section, who maintained that the congregational 'event' happens with or without ecclesiastical sanction, would have seemed to support this. However, according to George Yule, at the forefront of the commissioners' minds was the possibility of the eventual formation of an undivided church in Australia, in which case this wider definition of 'region' could become operative in the regulations of the church without the legal complexities of multi-denominational membership in a congregation. Nonetheless, this broadening of the concept of a congregation was highly suggestive.

2. Ibid.

renewed understanding of the significance of the local congregation in, for example, the 'Parish and People Movement' in the Church of England, the Iona Community, and as stimulated by stewardship and lay evangelistic campaigns, as an important development of their time. Further they anticipated that the participation of the Congregational Church in the union would be 'the occasion for the renewal of congregation life'. Especially with these circumstances in mind, they envisaged that the 'congregational meeting' would be an occasion on which the Spirit is sought to direct the people in their common missionary task and where responsibility will be shared in the episcopal duties of pastoral care and congregational government.<sup>1</sup>

There was no question of the congregation being absolved of its responsibility for the corporate exercise of episcopate by the potential expansion of the exercise of personal episcopate in the form of the ministry of bishops. In the congregation, the personal episcopate of the presbyter was understood to be accompanied by the responsibility of the congregation as a whole to exercise an oversight of its own life and mission. It was intended that both dimensions of the responsibility be revitalised to the greater fulfilment of the exercise of all ministry.

"We must place the oversight provided in the local congregation through the presbyter, in relation to corporate oversight arising from the life of the congregation itself."<sup>2</sup>

The corporate powers and responsibilities of oversight were seen by the Commission to be given representative expression through members

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.42.

of the congregation chosen to be 'associated with the presbyter in the care of the church and to be leaders of the laity in their witness and service in the world'.<sup>1</sup> They suggested that such representative members be ordained to the office of 'deacon'.<sup>2</sup> Elders of the Presbyterian Church, Deacons of the Congregational Church, Local Preachers of the Methodist Church, and Deaconesses of the uniting churches were recommended to be included in the office of deacon.

Although this gave some indication of what the diaconal office might entail,<sup>3</sup> it was not intended that there be simply a change of name by which the representative leaderships of the congregations of the uniting churches be reconstituted. It was not intended that the establishment of the diaconate be a convenient mechanism of merger, but it was seen by the Commission to express an important dimension of ministry and to provide the opportunity for a deep renewal of this type of

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1. Ibid., p.44.

2. No real explanation was given for the preference of this designation, though we might suggest several reasons. The term had biblical precedent. The Report cites Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8, and by way of explication, I Cor. 12:28 and Rom. 12:8. The term had also long been given an honoured place in the history of the church. More recently the office of 'deacon' had been adopted by the Church of South India, and was recommended for inclusion in the proposed unions in Ceylon and in North India and Pakistan. These churches, as we have seen, were being afforded a certain role as 'bellwethers' by the Australian negotiators (at least in the ordering of ordained ministry). The Congregational Church, represented on the Commission, already possessed an office of 'deacon'. And, the other chief contender, 'elder', was excluded by virtue of its being the literal equivalent of 'presbyter'.

3. Norman Young, op. cit., pp.326f. took the view that the new office was based more on the functions of existing elders, local preachers, deacons and deaconesses than on a reinterpretation of the New Testament diaconate, but acknowledged that the question was still being discussed.

service.<sup>1</sup> It was intended that, through the diaconate, the service of oversight be performed by a group which would include people personally involved in the daily life of the world; an involvement, we might infer, beyond the scope of presbyteral activity. It was not suggested that the presbyter is uninvolved in the world, but her involvement is more likely to be mostly of a 'clerical' nature which might imply a different perspective to that of 'non-clerical' ministry. It was further argued that the diaconal ministry would serve to symbolize the involvement of the church's mission in the secular world.

'The time of union provides an opportunity for a creative re-interpretation and broadening of this valuable form of ministry, so that members of the laity can be admitted to the diaconate, participating with the presbyters in the oversight of the congregation, and also reaching out into the ordinary vocations of life there to exercise their ministry of oversight and leadership among their fellow Christians in the world.'<sup>2</sup>

The Commission's perception of the nature of the office of deacon was based essentially on the Reformed understanding of the ministry of representative laity.<sup>3</sup> But they sought to broaden the historical basis

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1. Barry Till makes an interesting observation in this context, op. cit., p.323: 'But in almost every case this meaningless Anglican shibboleth about the diaconate as a constituent part of the essential threefold ministry has been transferred into the scheme for the united church. Deacons tend to be left out of the unification rites, which indicates the value put on their ministry, and no attempt is made to re-think the function of the diaconate, or to make its ministry meaningful. In this can be seen an unhappy example of the fact that unity schemes are still western-dominated and accept western premises and western shortcomings. Australia seems to be the honourable exception - a scheme in which Anglicans are only observers! There the negotiators have had much intensive discussion on the function of the diaconate in the contemporary church.' It is not clear whether Till intends to infer that this 'honourable exception' owes its difference to either or both non-western influence or the exclusion of Anglicans.
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.44.
  3. Cf. e.g., H. J. Wotherspoon and J. M. Kirkpatrick, op. cit., pp.99-102.

in their conception of the office in that, without in any sense diminishing the emphasis on the representative nature and 'secular' orientation of the diaconate, they saw it as being related more closely to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments than was the case in any of the uniting churches. It was their recommendation that appointment to the diaconate be by ordination by both a presbyter and a bishop 'with prayer and the laying on of hands'. It was their conviction that:

'Ordination of deacons implies a limited but genuine participation in the one order of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments; and therefore in preaching and teaching, liturgical and sacramental life, pastoral care and discipline.'<sup>1</sup>

Further, they made the interesting proposal that 'Councils other than the Council of the Congregation' might be empowered to elect and ordain deacons for the service of oversight of 'the special concerns for which they have responsibility'.<sup>2</sup> Thus they envisaged the possibility of diaconal service outside the context of the congregation, and the deacon as serving 'with and under', not only a presbyter, but also (by implication) a bishop. In these proposals we may identify the Commission's appreciation of the role of the deacon in the wider tradition of the church.

The Commission's description of diaconal ministry was rather vague in comparison to their discussion of the ministry of presbyters and bishops. This is not surprising nor necessarily to be seen as a shortcoming given that they were treading on new ground for the uniting

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.44.

2. Ibid.

churches, and that the diaconate has been historically less stable and less clearly defined than the presbyteral and episcopal offices because of its characteristic multiplicity of forms of service. It has traditionally been the diaconate which has been called upon to respond with greatest flexibility to the needs of the missionary church.<sup>1</sup> But as well as this the Commission made its proposals at a time when the nature of the diaconate was being given new consideration within the ecumenical movement.

This new interest had been precipitated by difficulties experienced in the Church of South India in the years following its inauguration. The Church of South India had inherited both a Reformed model of the diaconate, represented by the 'lay deacon' in the Congregational sense, and a 'catholic' model, represented by the 'ordained deacon' in the Anglican sense. Though they were constitutionally committed to the latter in their acceptance of the historic three-fold ministry,<sup>2</sup> there could be no question of interfering with the honoured body of men and women who exercised a ministry as 'lay deacons' and deaconesses. But by the same token it was thought inappropriate to perpetuate this problematic distinction. Consequently, a study was initiated into the nature of the diaconate. Proposals were put before the Third Synod which recommended means by which to develop the diaconate as a distinct form of ministry, emphasising that it should primarily be seen as a

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1. Cf. Max Thurian, Priesthood and Ministry - Ecumenical Research, translated by Paula Clifford, Mowbray, London and Oxford, 1983, pp.130f.

2. The Constitution of the Church of South India, op. cit., pp.33f. certainly intended a broadening of diaconal ministry beyond its role as simply a stage on the way to presbyteral ministry, and perhaps toward such as might accommodate both conceptions.



life-long service (not necessarily either stipendiary or full-time) though one in which candidates for the presbyterate ought normally to be expected to participate for a time. Though the resolutions embodying these recommendations were not adopted, the Synod clearly intended that the matter be further pursued.<sup>1</sup>

At Montreal, in 1963, the Commission on Faith and Order initiated an investigation into the question of the diaconate together with that of the ordination of women.<sup>2</sup> The results of this study were published in 1965 and 1966.<sup>3</sup> But again, very little progress was made. The main difficulty in this case was that it was realised that agreement on the question of the diaconate depended on a prior agreement on the doctrine of the ministry which at this time had not been reached.<sup>4</sup> Probably the most important contribution of this study was in its conclusion that 'the diaconate in all churches is in need of reform'.<sup>5</sup> The 'catholic' tendency to see the diaconate as a kind of 'auxiliary priesthood' and the Reformed tendency to isolate the diaconate from the worshipping life

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1. Cf. A. Marcus Ward, The Pilgrim Church - An Account of the First Five Years in the Life of the Church of South India, The Epworth Press, London, 1953, pp.82-88.
  2. The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., p.65. Cf. Ans J. Van Der Bent, Major Studies and Themes in the Ecumenical Movement, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1981, p.67.
  3. The Ministry of Deacons, World Council Studies No.2, The World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1965. This Report included an acknowledgement of the importance of the Australian Joint Commission's discussion of the subject, and reproduced the section on 'Deacons' from the Proposed Basis of Union, pp.5 and 85. The Deaconess - A Service of Women in the World Today, World Council of Churches Studies No.4, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1966.
  4. The Ministry of Deacons, op. cit., pp.35f; The Deaconess, op. cit. pp.16f.
  5. Ibid.

of the church, and the many variations on these misconceptions of the office, called for reform and renewal. The study represented an attempt to draw together the truths concerning the nature of the diaconate preserved in the separate traditions; truths which in separation amounted to distortions, but which, when taken together, provided a basis for the renewal of the diaconate's capacity to 'contribute to the development of the congregation's life of service'.<sup>1</sup>

That the section on 'Deacons' from the Commission's Proposed Basis of Union was appended to the report of the Faith and Order study indicated both that the question remained largely unresolved and that the Joint Commission had taken a lead in pursuing the question as far as could have been expected at that time. Their proposals were not narrowly Reformed, still less narrowly Presbyterian or Methodist or Congregationalist, but were the fruit of a genuinely ecumenical dialogue which took into account the tradition of the church in the widest

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1. The Ministry of Deacons, op. cit., pp. 34f.

possible sense, informed by the contemporary needs of the missionary church.<sup>1</sup>

(b) Episcope beyond the congregation

For the sake of the congregation in its life and mission, it had been proposed that the function of episcopate be given both personal and corporate expression. This service of oversight was to receive a personal expression through the ministries of the presbyter, fulfilling his particular responsibilities within the context and as facilitative of the church's mission, and the deacon, both in association with the

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1. Of as much interest as the discussion of the diaconate within the ecumenical movement, is the way that the question of the diaconate was ignored within the same movement. Cf. Relations Between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches, 'Being a Joint Report presented by Representatives of The Church of England, The Church of Scotland, the Episcopal Church of Scotland, The Presbyterian Church of England', The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1957; and Conversations - Between The Church of England and The Methodist Church, 'A Report to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Conference of the Methodist Church', Church Information Office and The Epworth Press, London, 1963. Given the ecumenical milieu in which these discussions took place and the involvement of churches in the Anglican communion in both, the failure to give attention to the question of the diaconate was conspicuous. In the former was included a statement on the history and function of 'The Eldership' by Church of Scotland members at the request of Anglican participants. This was intended as a rehearsal of the 'party line' (pp.43-49). In the latter the only important allusion to the question was the expression of an expectation that local preachers and class leaders would continue to exercise their ministry, but it was acknowledged that under full communion it would no longer be necessary or possible for the Conference to authorise lay administration of Holy Communion (p.55). Of course both these discussions took place prior to the Faith and Order study; but then so did the Australian negotiations. In 1966, The Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations, The Report of the panels appointed by The Church of Scotland, The Presbyterian Church of England, The Church of England and the Episcopal Church of Scotland, The Saint Andrew Press, S.P.C.K., did acknowledge the 'considerable debate' on the diaconate (p.21) but found it unnecessary to contribute. Close attention was paid to the Australian proposals concerning episcopacy (pp.24 and 52-59).

presbyter and as representative of the laity.<sup>1</sup> A corporate episcopate in the congregation was to be operative through the Congregational Meeting and, in a representative sense, through those members of the laity elected and ordained to be associated with the presbyter in her exercise of oversight and as leaders of the laity in witness and service in the world. But for as much as the congregation is its 'characteristic expression', the life of the church extends beyond the congregation. At this trans-congregational level it is also necessary to give the function of episcopate an effective and appropriate expression.

The Commission argued that the historical fact of the growth of human associations transcending the local life of people had led the churches to similarly strengthen its organs which transcend the local congregations.<sup>2</sup> In the strengthening of courts such as presbyteries, synods, conferences and assemblies the churches were understood as responding to the sociological changes affecting their congregations.<sup>3</sup>

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1. It is problematic to ascribe responsibility for the personal exercise of episcopate to the office of deacon precisely because it belongs to that office that it be representative of the laity and associated with the presbyter (or bishop). But equally it is not obviously clear that this function is always, or even normally, beyond the serving authority of the deacon since ordination to that office does indeed imply 'a limited but genuine participation' in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments.
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, p.45. It was less than a century since the uniting churches had established federal structures, and the development of their importance and effective functioning had been correlative with the development of parallel institutions in the national life and the improvement of the network of transportation and communication services which made it possible to organise activities on a national scale. Cf. J. J. Mol, Religion in Australia, *op. cit.*, pp.129f.
  3. It might be asked whether there is a difference between responding to sociological changes and participating in sociological change, the former being a more deliberate process than the latter. The Commission seemed to suggest that the former process had been primarily operative.

Further, the Commission argued that for as much as these courts had developed to provide a corporate oversight of the life of the church at regional, state and national levels, their work had been further supplemented by a kind of 'informal personal episcopate' in the form of clerks, moderators and chairmen. It was their contention that there had been a 'marked move' in the uniting churches towards a more permanent, formal expression of personal episcopate at this level.

'There is a reaching out towards the appointment of those who can fulfil such roles as pastor of pastors, overseer of a group of churches, spokesman for the Church in its evangelistic outreach and the 'voice' of the wider Church to the world.'<sup>1</sup>

In the Commission's view these 'pragmatic considerations' could and should be addressed in a manner supported by the biblical and historical understanding of ministry in the church. They saw the personal expression of episcopate as essential and as inseparable from its corporate expression at 'each level of the Church's life'.

'Our churches have recognised this necessity on the congregational level, and forced by modern developments in society to see the importance of trans-congregational levels of the Church's life, they would be justified also in providing personal as well as corporate episcopate at that level. Because this form of office is acceptable in the New Testament, is widely attested in Church history including our Protestant tradition, is justified by the Church's needs in contemporary society, and also helps to symbolise the wider unity of the Church, we recommend its adoption at the time of union.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.45. The Methodist 'separated chairmen', Presbyterian commissioners and superintendents, and Congregational moderators, were seen as evidence of this 'marked move' and 'reaching out'.
  2. Ibid., p.46.

In this recitation of the conditioning factors having been considered by the Commission we are given one of their clearest statements of what they saw as being determinative in giving form to ministry. They made no claim that the proposed form of episcopacy was demanded or enjoined by the New Testament evidence, but did see it as being 'acceptable' to and consistent with the apostolic witness; and necessarily so. Similarly, while affording no uncritical accommodation to the tradition of the church - obviously not, since the immediate history of the uniting churches made no place for bishops - they gave due weight to the lessons of the church of previous generations; and this in a broader way than had been the case in previous negotiations. They also saw as a necessary justification the needs of the church seeking to fulfil its missionary function under circumstances peculiar to their particular time and place. And further, eschewing any sectarian or parochial interest, they saw it as necessary to 'symbolise' the participation of the particular church in the life of the 'wider' church which, it became clear in later paragraphs, embraces churches of different nations and communions; the church of God.

As well as providing the necessary justification, the Commission set down some basic requirements for the acceptability of a form of personal episcopate at the trans-congregational level.<sup>1</sup> First, they saw it as necessary that personal episcopate be exercised within the context of corporate episcopate. Just as they saw this as essential in the congregation, it was also required for the proper exercise of oversight beyond the congregation. It was noted that 'Many historic and contemporary forms of episcopacy do not satisfy this requirement'. Neither

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1. Ibid., p.47.

at the congregational nor the trans-congregational levels may the personal exercise of episcopate be isolated from the corporate responsibility for oversight. Second, this ministry must be exercised in 'a genuinely personal way'. The representative nature of the episcopacy envisaged must include both responsibility to those represented and sufficient autonomy and scope for initiative so as to properly fulfil a service of personal oversight. And third,

'... every Church is under an obligation to order its life with a view to the wider union God desires for His Church; and therefore to take into account the history and tradition of the Church as a whole.'<sup>1</sup>

Having reproduced the statement, on the nature of the unity being sought by the churches, accepted at the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches,<sup>2</sup> the Commission went on to conclude,

'... it follows that no Church can rest content with the present position and that we should seek to ensure that no rigid adherence to tradition on our part bars the way towards 'a ministry accepted by all'.<sup>3</sup>

The Commission argued that the acceptability of a certain form of episcopacy must depend in part on its increasing and not diminishing the possibility of the recognition by other churches of the order of ministry to be established in the united church.

In a sense, therefore, they saw the acceptance of a form of episcopacy as being not only the prerogative of the uniting churches, but

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., footnote 1. Cf. The New Delhi Report, op. cit., p.116.

3. Ibid.

also of those other churches not participating in the union. The uniting churches must make their judgement with a consciousness of the judgement of the wider church. The justification for and the acceptability of a form of episcopacy was not only to be assessed according to the narrowly defined interests of the uniting churches, but was to be also measured against the hope that their act of union might be but one step in a much wider process of reunion. Commenting later on this aspect of the Report, Colin Williams wrote:

'In asking what form of ministry is required now, the scheme suggests that it would not be enough for these three churches of the Reformed tradition to develop a ministry acceptable to themselves. The mission of the church in Australia requires that the church become a sign of a community that crosses the barriers of culture ... nation, race, caste and class. In short there is an urgent need for the power of the church to transcend these divisions to appear - to become visible.'<sup>1</sup>

In ecclesiastical terms, a crucial division which had to be transcended was between episcopally and non-episcopally ordered churches; and in the Australian context this meant between the Anglican church (the largest denomination), and the uniting churches (which together were to become the second largest Protestant denomination). Reflecting recently on his involvement with the Joint Commission in the drafting of the Second Report, Williams said that their awareness that the structural self-expression and proclamation of the church needed to be informed by the 'secular' environment in which mission takes place:

'... meant that we took seriously the world situation in which the Australian Church would have to carry on its mission - in an Asian context,

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1. C. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp.107f. Williams had earlier produced an argument for the suitability of the threefold ministry for the Methodist church. Although his concern at the time was specifically with Wesleyan theology, his discussion is of relevance as background to his work with the Commission. See his John Wesley's Theology Today, The Epworth Press, London, 1960, p.241.



with a history which tempted it to act condescendingly to its non-European neighbours. It meant that we also took seriously the existence of the three uniting churches in a country where the Anglican Church was a central reality.<sup>1</sup>

The Anglican Church had sent official observers to meetings of the Joint Commission and took great interest in the progress of the discussions throughout the sixties. Copies of the Second Report were sent to all Anglican parishes for study.<sup>2</sup> The Commission wanted the uniting churches to recognise that the mission of the church in Australia would not best be served if they treated their union as a private matter, not acknowledging as terms of reference the life and mission of the wider church.

This ecumenical consideration was reiterated in the discussion of the appropriate name for the episcopal office. Although it was acknowledged that there was 'a strong and understandable degree of prejudice against the term',<sup>3</sup> the name 'bishop' was taken up to designate the office of personal episcopus at the trans-congregational level. It was observed that 'bishop' is the traditional translation of the New Testament term episcopos, and that the word is not unknown to sections of the Reformed and Methodist churches. However the proviso was added that the term 'bishop' must be subject to reinterpretation according to the Word of God (ecclesia semper reformanda) so that any attending distortions might be excluded.<sup>4</sup> Further it was argued that:

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1. C. Williams to A. F. Dutney, 19 January, 1983.
  2. See Ecumenical Review, Vol. XVI, 1963-64, p.424; Vol. XVIII, 1966, p.363.
  3. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.47.
  4. Ibid., p.48.

'The use of the term in such large areas of the Church's life in the present day suggests that in looking forward to the wider union which we believe to be God's will for His Church, we should accept the word as a sign of this wider intention.'<sup>1</sup>

The Commission was determined to maintain that the acceptance of the office of bishops should not cast any doubt on the recognition of the validity of the past and existing ministries of the uniting churches. They were seen as being God's gift to the church 'at particular times in response to particular needs'.<sup>2</sup> The new initiative was a response to the contemporary call of God and made no judgement on the response of past generations to God's demand. The move was to be seen as the response of obedience which entails different actions in different ages, but which for that time suggested that the church was called 'in the present to relate the ministries we have received to the ministries of the wider Church'.<sup>3</sup>

The office to be created was to be such as to remain open to reform and new obedience in the on-going life of the church, 'and therefore its form must be subject to the decisions of the Church through its Councils'. It was intended therefore that the bishops must be 'bishops-in-presbytery', exercising their ministry always within the corporate episcopate of the presbyters.<sup>4</sup>

But having stressed the answerability of bishops to the representative courts of the church, the Commission argued that the episcopal

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., pp.48 and 49. The Presbytery was to consist also of 'representative Deacons', pp.63 and 86.

office must be given a form which will allow the exercise of a truly personal episcopate. Bishops must be given an area of operation which allows effective oversight of the presbyters and churches in their care. It was suggested that regions of oversight might not always be geographically determined, but might include 'sociological regions' such as industry, education, health institutions and areas of work for which church departments are responsible. It was even suggested that such a thing as 'team episcopacy' might be useful in situations where there were presbyters working in a region where different geographical and sociological types were juxtaposed. A team of bishops in such a situation could co-ordinate the work and planning of presbyters 'in order that the power of Christ may enable diverse groups to grow into unity in Him across their human divisions'.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission sought a form of episcopacy which was both appropriate to the understanding of the nature of ministry in the uniting churches and their traditions, and sufficient for the task of oversight as it was demanded by the contemporary needs of the missionary church.

'The Commission rejects the view which tends to see all episcopate as belonging by Christ's appointment to the bishop, with some of his authority being delegated to presbyters and deacons, but with the bishop as the real guardian of that authority. Indeed, the view accepted here sees authority in the Church as one of continuing inter-relation between persons and groups, and believes that a truly episcopal church is one that takes seriously the episcopate given by the Church at every level of the Church's life ... The bishop ... must have the freedom and initiative necessary to the fulfilment of his tasks, and at the same time be responsible for the fulfilment of those tasks to his fellow-presbyters within the bounds of the Church.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.48f. Cf. C. Williams, The Church, op. cit., pp.126f.

2. Ibid., p.49.

In describing the duties of the bishop, the Commission chose to use general terms which took up the essential elements of the episcopal function as it had been understood in the past, but maintaining the Reformed emphases which were seen as crucial if they were to be faithful to the witness of the past and to the demands of the present.<sup>1</sup> The development of a detailed description of the episcopal function would have to arise from the discussion in the uniting churches and subsequently in the Constitution Commission. The novelty of their proposal meant that the Commission's first task was to secure an agreement in principle.

Following the three-fold office of Christ, from which all ministry derives, the Commission described the function of the bishop as having prophetic, priestly and kingly dimensions. In his prophetic office the bishop has 'primary responsibility' for the maintenance of the true expression of the Christian faith in preaching, teaching and evangelism. This particularly involves a duty with respect to the call, training and 'continuing growth in Christian knowledge' of the ministers to whom he is a 'father-in-God'. In his priestly office the bishop has 'primary responsibility' for the oversight of the sacramental and liturgical life of the diocese. This involves a duty with respect to the due

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1. They did not choose to follow the example of the recent Asian schemes in which a comparatively detailed description of 'The Functions and Responsibilities of Bishops' was provided. Cf. The Constitution of the Church of South India, op. cit., pp.21-26; Scheme of Church Union in Ceylon, op. cit., pp.31-35; Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan, op. cit., pp.12-15. The latter two statements were reflective of the C.S.I. statement. In their discussion of the ministries of presbyters and deacons the Commission had shown a greater attention to these examples. They did however take a keen interest in the C.S.I. episcopate, as we shall see below, though for reasons more complex than the need for a statement on which to model their own.

administration of the sacraments, the observance of confirmation, and the continuous maintenance of the ministries of oversight. In his kingly office the bishop is pastor parvorum, 'caring for the shepherds, fostering the unity of the people with each other and the wider Church', and taking initiative and responsibility for discipline in the church.<sup>1</sup>

'In all these matters the bishop must have freedom and initiative; in all of them he must also be responsible to the Councils of the Church.'<sup>2</sup>

(c) The Concordat with the Church of South India

Once it had been determined that the ordering of ministry on an episcopal basis was pragmatically required and theologically and historically justified, and once it had been decided what form of episcopacy was acceptable, the Commission was faced with the question of how to create the new bishops. The first possibility was that the church could make its own bishops at the time of union. But because this would deprive the episcopate of its role as a symbol of continuity and unity in the order of ministry, and because this would in no way serve to demonstrate the wider unity of the church (which was an important justification for their decision), this possibility was rejected. A unilateral, and in a sense schismatic, act of this kind would compound the problem of the dividedness of the church and of the world rather than enlarge the potentiality for unity.<sup>3</sup>

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.49f.

2. Ibid., p.50.

3. Ibid., p.51.

The second possibility was that the uniting churches should 'seek full and immediate unification of their ministries with the 'historic episcopate'' by means of union with the Anglican Church, following the proposals for Ceylon and for North India and Pakistan. But again this possibility was rejected since it would, in the Commission's view, compromise their conviction of the validity of the existing ministries of the uniting churches.<sup>1</sup>

The third suggestion was rather unexpected but immediately recommended itself to the Commission.

'That the uniting churches should accept our present ministries as they are, affirming that God owned and blessed them as true ministries of His Word and Sacraments, and in the act of making our episcopate, unite it with the episcopate of the Church of South India.'<sup>2</sup>

This proposal was adopted by the Commission on the grounds that it would signify their belief that God was calling the Australian church to unite with the Asian church in one mission, and that it would afford a wider recognition to the new bishops than would otherwise be possible. It was therefore proposed that the uniting churches enter into a 'Concordat with the Church of South India' at the time of union.

This recommendation was specifically related to the need for the Australian church to express its commitment to its geographical 'neighbourhood', particularly Asia. The invitation to join the EACC was seen as significant, being an acknowledgement that the churches of Asia and Australasia have a 'common task in this region', and the recognition

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1. Ibid., p.52. L. Newbigin, op. cit., was cited as expressing criticisms of these proposals with which the Commission concurred.

2. Ibid.

that this task is best fulfilled as the churches share in consultation to that end. It was seen by the Commission that the old distinction between 'giving' and 'receiving' churches was inappropriate to mission in Asia and Australasia. The Australian churches are not called to act unilaterally in mission to Asia, but to participate in the mission of the Asian church on the basis of consultation with the churches of that region.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore it was seen that the churches of Asia ought to be allowed to contribute to the life of the Australian church if the latter is to be in some sense an 'Asian' church.

'We shall serve them, and ourselves, ill if we appear to think only of a Uniting Church which will be altogether 'Western' in its form as well as its origins.'<sup>2</sup>

The Commission saw the proposal as being not only a means to bridge the divide between episcopal and non-episcopal churches, but also as an opportunity to visibly transcend the division between races.

The Commission believed that the Concordat with the Church of South India would serve to accomplish what they had sought to achieve

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1. Ibid., pp.52f. The Partnership/Selfhood discussion, which was focused in Asia, was at its height at the time when the Commission was preparing the Report. Their comments showed their awareness of the mood of the Asian church, and also their perception of the opportunity for renewal in mission afforded by cooperation with the churches in the near north which by then defied the paternalistic tag of 'younger churches'. Cf. e.g., L. Newbigin, One Body, One Gospel, One World - The Christian Mission Today, International Missionary Council, London and New York, 1958, pp.31-38; and D. T. Niles, Upon the Earth - The Mission of God and the Missionary Enterprise of the Churches, 'Foundations of the Christian Mission - Studies in the Gospel and the World', Lutterworth Press, London, 1962, especially pp.139-194.
  2. Ibid., p.53.

all along : to relate the faith and order of the church to its missionary calling; to propose a scheme of union by which the new church could be at once faithful to the tradition of the church of God in past generations, and faithful to the call of God to mission in the contemporary situation.

'... two preoccupations of the Commission are brought together in the proposal which we now put forward; namely, a preoccupation with the call of God upon us to fulfil the mission of this hour; and, a preoccupation with the fulness of the Church's faith and order. The two are not finally separable : they are one.'<sup>1</sup>

The Commission identified some specific considerations which lay behind their proposal. First, in the Church of South India, the three traditions which were involved in the Australian negotiations had already accepted a form of episcopacy and, by all reports, had been confirmed in their conviction that this was part of God's will for his church by subsequent experience. Second, the acceptance of episcopacy by the Church of South India was seen as an important milestone in the ecumenical movement in that it was one based on the 'historic episcopate', which had been taken as one element of 'the coming unity which is God's will for His Church' since the formulation of the Chicago/Lambeth Quadrilateral,<sup>2</sup> but with the unambiguous acceptancy of the validity of the ministries of the non-episcopal churches involved. Third, episcopacy in the Church of South India was seen to have been reformed in the direction of 'bishop-in-presbytery'. And fourth, the

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1. Ibid., p.53.

2. The Commission did not explicitly acknowledge that the C.S.I. scheme took the historic episcopate as a goal to be achieved within the first generation after union, and not as a prerequisite for union, as was intended in the Quadrilateral.



Commission believed that such a step by the uniting churches would hasten the fulfilment of their hope for union with the Anglican church.<sup>1</sup>

For the Commission, the proposed Concordat would accomplish two things with regard to the relationship between the uniting churches and the Anglican church. On the one hand, in being the means of adopting episcopacy according to the requirement of the fourth point of the Quadrilateral, it would affirm their commitment to their hope for union with the Anglican church, and would 'call Anglicans to a decision concerning unity'.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand in joining with the Church of South India in reforming episcopacy by reintegrating personal and corporate expressions of episcopacy, the uniting churches would signal their conviction that reunion goes hand-in-hand with renewal. The Anglican church too must find a willingness to open itself to reform according to what might be perceived as the will of God for his church. The acceptance by the uniting churches of episcopacy through the proposed Concordat would not simply serve as a gesture of modus vivendi, but

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1. Ibid., pp.54f. The Report made no explicit comment on the problems which might be posed by the rather equivocal response of the Anglican communion to the South India scheme of union. Cf. The Lambeth Conference 1948, S.P.C.K. and Seabury Press, London, 1948, pp.38f and 2.44; and The Lambeth Conference 1958, S.P.C.K. and Seabury Press, London, 1958, pp.2.25-2.28. The Commission did, however, acknowledge the potential danger to their relationship with the Anglican church in 'bringing another expression of episcopal ministry into being alongside of, and even in opposition to, the existing episcopacy of the Church of England in Australia' (p.56).
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.56f. The Report included a qualification of the fourth point of the Quadrilateral: '... (iv) The historic episcopate; but which will also have reformed episcopacy in the direction we believe to be necessary to open the way to the coming unity', (p.57).

would constitute a call to the Anglican church to the urgent search for union and deep renewal with the uniting churches.

'It is our belief that by following this path we will make it easier for the Church of England to move more rapidly to unity with us ... We also dare to hope that other Churches in Australia and in other parts of the world will find that in these proposals they are confronted by the real questions which God is putting before His Church and through which He is calling us all to wider and deeper unity.'<sup>1</sup>

(iv) The 'Reservation'

It was in their proposals concerning the ministry that the Commission's sublime conception of Christian unity found its most compelling expression. It was here that the soliloquy came to an end and the Commission addressed the uniting churches in a way that demanded reply. It had been easy to ignore the theological discussion of the First Report, intellectually provocative though it was, but it was much more difficult to avoid responding one way or another to concrete proposals for the reform and renewal of the ministry.

Determined to maintain continuity with the church of the past, and determined to be responsive to the call of God to unity and mission in the present, the Commission strove to frame proposals for the ministry which would be both the expression and realization of this determination. In the narrow sense, the proposals provided for the uniting churches' renewal in mission as the obligation of which was seen to be incumbent upon the whole church and its every member. In the proposals for presbyteral ministry, therefore, the emphasis was placed on the

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1. Ibid., p.57.

necessity of the presbyter's ministry being exercised always within the context and as facilitative of the members' ministries. The proposals for the diaconate were intended to provide for the deepening of lay responsibility for oversight in the congregation, and the revivification of lay leadership in the witness and service of the church in the wider community. In the proposals for the episcopate provision was made for a service of personal oversight at the trans-congregational level in addition to the corporate forms of oversight which had been inherited. Again, the intention in this was to enrich and renew the life and mission of the church beyond the local community.

But this aspect of missionary renewal through union was indeed only the narrow edge of a much broader wedge of reform which the Commission believed as being driven by God between his church and its 'defection'. And so, in their proposals concerning the episcopate the Commission set up a sign which pointed the uniting churches away from parochial and sectarian interest in the approach to union, and towards a union which would be seen as an occasion on which far wider concerns for mission and unity - transcending ecclesiastical, national and racial boundaries - must be brought to bear. It would have been one thing for the Commission to have satisfied itself with only a verbal affirmation of this wider perspective; they would then have been answerable only for the spilling of ink. But it was another matter entirely that they found a mechanism - namely the Concordat with the Church of South India as the means of creating the proposed episcopate - by which they could give concrete expression to their commitment to unity and mission in the widest sense.

In the proposals for the introduction of episcopacy and for the closely related Concordat with the Church of South India, the Commission put it to the uniting churches that the task at hand, which had been pursued by their representatives on the Joint Commission and which now passed to their memberships and courts, was not just to do what was sufficient for the purposes of the immediate act of union but to go beyond the sufficient to the possible. To do what was sufficient to unite the three churches would be good, but the proposals put forward made it possible to go beyond this and make their act of union a real step towards the wider unity of which they dreamt, and this would be better.

This challenge was underscored in the name suggested for the new church, 'The Uniting Church in Australia'.<sup>1</sup> Other names had been elsewhere suggested; for example A. H. Wood had discussed 'The United Church', 'The Reformed Church of Australia', 'The Evangelical Church of Australia' and, his favourite at that time, 'The Uniting Church of Australia', as possibilities.<sup>2</sup> But by identifying the new church as 'Uniting' it was affirmed both that there were limitations in the immediate union, that it was not the full realisation of their hope, and that the new church would commit itself to the continuing movement towards the unity which God intends for his church. The choice of preposition in the name implied an identification of the Australian church with the church throughout the world and placed its act of union in the wider context.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.77. The name appeared here and incidentally at various places in the Report, but without comment.
  2. A. Harold Wood, 'The Uniting Church of Australia' - Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, op. cit., p.39.
  3. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, 'Faith and Order : A Tribute', op. cit., p.245.

Having called on the uniting churches, through the discussion in the Report and particularly through the proposals put forward, to enlarge their conception of the task at hand, it is important to notice that within the Commission itself there was already a reaction against their more radical proposals. Four Methodist and three Presbyterian members of the Commission recorded a 'Reservation' at the conclusion of the Report. In essence they argued that the proposal for the institution of episcopacy and the related proposal for the Concordat with the Church of South India were matters which were extraneous to the main task of producing a scheme by which the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches might be united, and that rather than confuse the issues and jeopardize the success of negotiations, they ought to be left to be dealt with by the Uniting Church after its inauguration.<sup>1</sup>

In his description of the development of the Commission's proposals for the introduction of episcopacy Davis McCaughey later wrote:

'The Commission as a whole divided on the question of the time of introduction. Those who were for doing so at the time of union were compelled to this conclusion by the argument that once to have acknowledged such episcopacy as part of God's good gift to the life of his Church and not to have laid hold of it as opportunity for renewal and reform arose would be like the young Augustine praying 'Make me pure but not yet': to which the counter-argument of others ran that they did not see that the purity of the Church to that extent depended upon bishops.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, pp.68f. Cf. The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XVI, 1963-64, p.424.
  2. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', *op. cit.*, p.47.

The Commission certainly saw these proposals as being related as much to the ecumenical task of the Uniting Church as to the pastoral needs of that church alone (if it is proper to separate the two). They provided, in a sense, for a 'step two' after the first step of union. The 'Reservation' need not be seen as reactionary but as the acknowledgement both that 'step one' must be taken without unnecessary delay if they are to be faithful to the call of God, and that certain responsibilities for the on-going response of obedience properly belong to the new church and not to the negotiators preparing for its inauguration. It should be recognised too that there was never any question of the ecumenical commitment of the signatories of the 'Reservation'.<sup>1</sup>

In its questioning of the advisability and propriety of the attempt to give structural expression to the Commission's adventurous conception of the ecumenical task, the 'Reservation' was a portent of things to come. Although it excited the interest of observers worldwide<sup>2</sup> the Proposed Basis of Union evoked a more equivocal response from those to whom it was not just an academic matter but one which could radically affect the future of 'their' church. It meant the shifting of focus from the relatively private question of a limited union to the far broader question of the actual and potential relevance of this

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1. The signatories were all active proponents of the ecumenical movement. H. G. Secomb and A. C. Watson were official delegates at Amsterdam in 1948, W. Cumming Thom was an 'alternative' delegate at that Assembly, H. H. Trigge was a delegate at New Delhi in 1961, A. H. Wood was the author of publications which vigorously supported ecumenical endeavour (one of which is cited above), and J. P. Adam shared the ecumenical enthusiasm of his father, Prof. D. S. Adam, who had been a leading figure in the 1918-1924 union negotiations.

2. We have already cited examples of this interest in British and WCC documents, and in the work of scholarly ecumenical observers. Cf. also The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XVI, 1963-64, pp.423f; Vol. XVIII, 1966, pp.352f; and Vol. XX, 1968, pp.275f.

union to a larger set of ecclesiastical, national and racial relationships. What had begun as a somewhat domestic exercise had been reframed as a matter of much greater consequence. It was, frankly, more than anyone had bargained for.

Chapter Three

The Response to the Proposed Basis  
of Union : 1963-1968



## Section One

### The 'Essential Issues' According to the Joint Commission on Church Union

- (i) Introduction
- (ii) Willingen to Mexico - Convergence and Consensus
- (iii) The 'essential issues' before the uniting churches

(i) Introduction

The Reports of the Joint Commission were not intended for popular consumption. Although they had sought to avoid 'unnecessary obscurity', the Commission had seen their task as being the formulation of a 'considered report' for the uniting churches which would need to be represented to their memberships by their educational and other appropriate organs.<sup>1</sup> This process of presentation, representation, discussion and subsequent amendment could neither be quick nor simple; and in the event it was longer and more complex than had been anticipated. In the first instance the Reports and Proposed Basis of Union would have to be received, discussed and commended for study by the Methodist General Conference in May 1963, the Biennial Assembly of the Congregational Union in May 1964, and the Presbyterian General Assembly in September 1964. After this it was anticipated that suggested amendments would be received from individuals and church bodies by the Joint Commission in 1966, which would then draft a revised Basis for the purposes of voting. During this second stage of the Commission's work a Joint Constitution Commission would be set up to prepare the 'Interim Constitution' for the Uniting Church. It was the Basis of Union and not the Interim Constitution which would be the subject of membership voting. The early hope had been that this process would be complete and Uniting Church inaugurated by 1970, but the Joint Commission did not conclude its work until 1971, and due to a certain confusion in voting and subsequent legal disputes, the union was not consummated until 1977.<sup>2</sup>

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, p.6.
  2. Cf. *ibid.*, p.9; The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XVI, 1963-1964, p.424; Vol. XX, 1968, p.275; Vol. XXIV, 1972, p.361; Vol. XXVI, 1974, p.313; Vol. XXVIII, 1976, pp.324-326; Vol. XXX, 1978, pp.241f.

The 'reservationists'' caveat on the Proposed Basis of Union of 1963 was timely in indicating from the outset the difficulties which lay ahead and identifying the initial points on which proponents of the scheme would have to concentrate their energies. In the Introduction to the Second Report the Commission explained that they had not attended to constitutional detail both because that task was to be left to a Constitution Commission and, more particularly, because:

'The Commission is convinced that the vote should be taken on the basic theological decisions which determine the Church's faith and order ... to present a Constitution for voting could easily result in confusing the voter by a maze of detail in which the essential issues would be lost.'<sup>1</sup>

What the Commission had seen as the 'essential issues' can be located with relative precision as arising from a particular set of trends and events within the world-wide ecumenical movement. We have already sought to place the Commission's work within the wider ecumenical context, but it is necessary that we now consider more directly the world situation without appreciation of which the 'essential issues' raised by the Commission cannot be properly understood.

This is necessary for at least two reasons. First, the Australian proposals of 1963 were at once reflective of an 'ecclesiological consensus' which had begun to emerge in the ecumenical movement, and also indicative of the way in which that consensus was to develop in the following years. The Australian proposals were representative of the cutting edge of a much broader blade. They therefore only make sense within that international perspective. Second, it was in Australia

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, p.9.

that this ecclesiological consensus was put to the test of being embodied in concrete proposals for church union. Taken from the somewhat rarified atmosphere of the conference and the commission the delicately contrived consensus was subjected to the ordeal of the scrutiny and judgement of the membership of the uniting churches whose needs and aspirations in a particular time and place demanded a scheme which commended itself as much by its utility as its verity. The 'essential issues', therefore, are found to make real sense in their reception by the uniting churches.

On the one hand, in the wider ecumenical movement we find the explication of the 'essential issues' as perceived by the Commission. On the other hand, we find in the Australian developments after 1963 an indication of what these issues might mean when refined in the crucible of an actual scheme of union in a particular time and place.

(ii) Willingen to Mexico - Convergence and Consensus

At New Delhi in 1961 the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches were integrated - an important event precipitated by and signalling an important convergence of missiological and ecclesiological thought. The integration, though foreseen by some as natural and inevitable, was nonetheless difficult to accomplish principally for reasons related to the fact that the IMC was not an association of churches but of National Christian Councils and Missionary Societies upon which the church's missionary obligation had traditionally fallen.<sup>1</sup> That these organizations could come together,

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1. Cf. B. Till, op. cit., pp.246f; L. Newbigin in H. E. Fey (ed.), op. cit., pp.182f; and N. Goodall, The Ecumenical Movement - What It Is And What It Does, Oxford University Press, London, 1964 (Second Edition), pp.128-133 and 156-158.

or, more specifically, that the IMC decided to continue its work under a 'churchly' umbrella, was indicative of developments which had taken place in missionary thinking and activity after the second world war.

Meeting at Whitby, in 1947, in the aftermath of war and with the barest perception of what was to come in the countries which constituted the traditional 'mission field', there was a sense of optimism in the IMC as it heard the summons to an 'expectant evangelism'. It was here that the realization was expressed that the church had become as never before 'really world wide'.<sup>1</sup> As the 'younger' churches approached the age of majority the slogan 'partnership in obedience' gained currency as the affirmation that older and younger churches were together called to accept responsibility for mission. At Willingen, in 1952, the mood had changed. With the demolition of the colonial edifice which had provided the traditional framework for mission, the nationalist and independence movements in what was to be called the 'third world' and the accompanying need for the churches in those lands to develop an independent and indigenous life, and with the 'crisis of faith' and dissolution of the 'Christendom situation' in the western world reaching a climax, the missionary movement faced deep uncertainties about its future.<sup>2</sup> Addressing the conference, Canon Max Warren expressed the mood which had led to its being called:

'But here at Willingen clouds and thick darkness surround the city, and we know with complete certainty that the most testing days of Christian mission in our generation lie just ahead ... We

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1. 'Whitby Statements', in N. Goodall, *ibid.*, p.211.

2. Cf. B. Till, *op. cit.*, pp.247f; and L. Newbigin, in H. E. Fey (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.175.

have to be ready to see the day of missions, as we have known them, as having already come to an end.'<sup>1</sup>

But Willingen, to use Norman Goodall's terms, was a Milestone, not a Terminus,<sup>2</sup> and the deliberations of that gathering gave impetus to much of the work which was to follow. Responding to a sharp criticism of the 'Church-centric' view of mission,<sup>3</sup> and to an expression of the need to relate the missionary task to signs of the sovereignty of Christ in the secular world, it was affirmed at Willingen that the mission is the Missio Dei, and that mission must be seen as belonging to the essential nature of the church.<sup>4</sup> In the Report of Section I on 'The Missionary Obligation of the Church' it was affirmed that:

'There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world.'

and also that:

'The nearer the Church draws to its Lord the nearer it draws to the world. Christians do not live in an enclave separated from the world. They are God's people in the world.'<sup>5</sup>

At the next major conference of the IMC, in Ghana in 1957, these affirmations were re-emphasised:

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1. N. Goodall (ed.), Missions Under the Cross, 'Addresses delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements issued by the Meeting', published for the IMC by Edinburgh House Press, London, 1953, p.40.
  2. Ibid., pp.9-23.
  3. A 'church-centric' view was taken as implied in the title of Section I, 'The Missionary Obligation of the Church'. The criticism was led by J. C. Hoekendijk who remained an influential and controversial figure for the next two decades. For an understanding and evaluation of Willingen, and Hoekendijk's view, see W. Anderson, 'Further Toward a Theology of Mission', in G. H. Anderson (ed.), The Theology of the Christian Missions, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1961, pp.300-313.
  4. Cf. L. Newbigin, in H. E. Fey (ed.), op. cit., pp.178f.
  5. International Missionary Council, The Missionary Obligation of the Church, 'Willingen, Germany, July 5-17, 1952', Edinburgh House Press, London, 1952, pp.4f. For an analysis of the theological contribution of Willingen, see W. Anderson, Towards a Theology of Mission, IMC Research Pamphlet No.2, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1955; and see also R. C. Bassham, 'Seeking A Deeper Theological Basis for Mission', International Review of Mission, Vol. 67, No.267, July 1978, pp.329-337.

'The Christian world mission is Christ's, not ours ... But we are none the less fellow-workers with Christ in His mission ... So we are responsible. Each of us in his own place, each local company of Christ's people, each church in its organized life cannot be Christ's without being his missionary servant.'<sup>1</sup>

During this period also there was a parallel emphasis in IMC discussion expressed in the phrase 'mission in unity'. Again it was the experience of the younger churches which had forced the issue. Struggling to shoulder their 'new' missionary responsibility the younger churches found denominational dividedness to be a 'crippling handicap'. At Willingen their delegates presented a statement of their conviction that:

'While unity may be desirable in the lands of older churches it is imperative in those of the younger churches.'<sup>2</sup>

The Meeting responded to the younger churches' plea, issuing a Statement on 'The Calling of the Church to Mission and Unity', in which it was affirmed that:

'The love of God in Christ calls for the three-fold response of worship, unity and mission. These three aspects of the Church's response are interdependent; they become corrupted when isolated from each other. Division in the Church distorts its witness, frustrates its mission, and contradicts its own nature. If the Church is to demonstrate the Gospel in its life as well as in its preaching, it must manifest to the world the power of God to break down all barriers and to establish the Church's unity in Christ. Christ is not divided.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. R. K. Orchard (ed.), The Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council, '28th December, 1957 to 8th January, 1958; Selected Papers, with an Essay on the Role of the IMC', published for the IMC by Edinburgh House Press, London, 1958, pp.180f.
  2. In N. Goodall, The Ecumenical Movement, op. cit., pp.38f.
  3. The Missionary Obligation of the Church, op. cit., p.6.

We have already noticed, in the preceding Chapter, that an emphasis had been developing in WCC discussions between Evanston and New Delhi that 'mission' must be added as a 'mark' of the church. In working to solve the ecclesiological problem of the dividedness of the church it was being suggested that it was insufficient to deal only with such visible marks as Word and Sacraments. A Barthian emphasis had re-emerged which maintained that the church 'happens' in the event of faith and obedience. So in addition to the visible continuities in the church it was now thought necessary to:

'... look also for the event of obedience to the mission of Christ. Unity is given us not just in the historical continuities; it is a gift that is received only as we obey the one call to mission.'<sup>1</sup>

As discussion, negotiation and preparation for the integration of the IMC and the WCC gained momentum, in the second half of the fifties, fears were expressed that missionary concern, which had long been the precinct of the specialized missionary bodies, would be pushed to the periphery if it were entrusted to the churches. But according to the new perception of the nature of the church and of mission it was precisely the churches which must shoulder the responsibility for mission as part of their essential nature. According to Visser 't Hooft, the real question at issue was not one of 'churchifying mission but of mobilizing the Church for its mission'.<sup>2</sup>

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1. C. Williams, The Church, op. cit., p.15. Cf. also H.-R. Weber, op. cit., pp.36-42 and pp.232f, where he describes the emergence of a missionary emphasis alongside the emphasis on unity in the WCC conception of the ecumenical task; again, this development was in part a response to the efforts of certain prominent Asian church leaders.
  2. See L. Newbigin, in H. E. Fey (ed.), op. cit., pp.182f.



From the side of the IMC it was being seen that mission is essentially a 'churchly' activity. From the side of the WCC it was being seen that the church is essentially missionary. And from all sides it was being seen that the missionary church is essentially one, and must become visibly so.

The integration in 1961 necessitated some structural reorganization within the WCC so that the particular concerns of the IMC could be continued. And so among the changes which took place at New Delhi was the formation of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism. Further enhancing the status of the ex-independent operations of the IMC, the new DWME was also constituted as a Commission, affording it a certain continuing independence.<sup>1</sup> But in the Constitution of the (cumbersomely entitled) Commission on and Division of World Mission and Evangelism the new thinking on mission was suggested. Among its functions were to be:

- '(i) to keep before the churches their calling and privilege to engage in constant prayer for the missionary and evangelistic work of the Church;
- (ii) to remind the churches of the range and character of the unfinished evangelistic task and to deepen their sense of missionary obligation ...'<sup>2</sup>

In its Report, the Assembly's Committee on the new DWME indicated their conviction that in perpetuating the special work of the IMC it was necessary to take account of the new circumstances and new understanding of mission:

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1. For a summary of the restructuring which took place at New Delhi see B. Till, op. cit., pp.252f.
  2. W. A. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), The New Delhi Report, op. cit., p.421.

'The programme of the new Division is not here fully described. It will provide a new frontier, a new dimension of the World Council. We have made a general outline of its task. We cannot now define all its deeper meanings nor the extent of its activities. Only the experience of living and working together can teach us these. Our temptation will be to think of the Division simply as the continuation of the interests of the International Missionary Council with emphasis on Asia, Africa and South America. We must resist this temptation. This is the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. We are concerned not with three continents but with six.'<sup>1</sup>

At the New Delhi Assembly also, the Committee on the Department on Studies in Evangelism took an important step forward in proposing a new study on 'The Missionary Structure of the Congregation'. Introducing the study, the Committee made their point forcefully:

'The Committee is convinced that one of the main hindrances in the pursuit of the evangelistic calling of the Church lies in the traditional structure of the congregation. We need to ask to what degree the existing patterns of church life affect its witness. Is there, in fact, need for a revival, renewal or change of church life in certain of its structures to make possible relevant and effective witness to the Gospel?'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.250.  
2. Ibid., p.189.

The study was one of the more 'successful' activities of the WCC during the sixties and excited considerable interest throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> Though in terms of actually offering some concrete suggestions for the renewal of the church in the local setting the results of the study were perhaps less than had been hoped,<sup>2</sup> it provided a point on which much important study could focus and around which the ecclesiological consensus could form.

Work on the new study was underway within months of the New Delhi Assembly, and what was termed a 'morphological fundamentalism' was being identified and challenged.<sup>3</sup> The new perception of the relationship between Christ, the world, and the church, and its bearing upon the missionary impulse and the church's form had begun to be expressed at an early stage; as can be seen, for example, in

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1. Cf. A. J. Van Der Bent, op. cit., p.36. For an understanding of the nature and results of this study, see: T. Wieser (ed.), Planning For Mission - Working Papers on the New Quest for Missionary Communities, The U.S. Conference for the World Council of Churches, New York, 1966; The Church For Others - Two Reports on the Missionary Structure of the Congregation, 'Final Report of the Western European Working Group and North American Working Group of the Department on Studies in Evangelism', World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1968; New Delhi To Uppsala, 1961-1968, 'Report of the Central Committee to the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches', World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1968, pp.66-70; N. Goodall (ed.), The Uppsala Report, 1968, 'Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, July 4-20, 1968', World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1968, p.200. Cf. also, C. W. Williams, Where In The World?, NCCC (U.S.A.), New York, 1963; What In The World?, The Epworth Press, London, 1965; and Faith In A Secular Age, Collins Fontana Books, London, 1966, pp.12-18. The latter book is of further interest in that it is based on lectures delivered by Williams in Australia on the invitation of the ACC's 'Frontier' group (December 1964 - January 1965).
  2. Cf. D. L. Edwards in H. E. Fey (ed.), op. cit., pp.406f.
  3. Cf. Concept - Papers from the Department on Studies in Evangelism, Documents 1, September 1962; and also New Delhi To Uppsala, 1961-1968, op. cit., p.69.

the papers from the North American conference on the theme at Yale in September 1963.<sup>1</sup> It was seen that the congregation was structured almost entirely according to residential considerations. This had been the missionary response of a past generation to a world in which almost all aspects of life centred on the relatively self-contained residential community. But in the new world, where many aspects of life had been separated from residence (education, employment, health, politics, leisure), the exclusively residential conception of the congregation represented a missionary failure in that:

'... it is now true that in many of the places where basic decisions are made, energies expended and anxieties formed, the presence of Christ in word, sacrament and fellowship, is not provided.'<sup>2</sup>

The church's response to Christ's call to mission demands that it respond to the changing social patterns of the world. Addressing the question, 'What are the forms that will direct the life of the Church to its intended goal of penetrating every geographic and social realm?', Colin Williams affirmed that:

'There is no 'blueprint' for this. There is instead only a calling : a calling to the church to turn its life outward to the world and its needs; a calling to be an open community of Christ moving out across the walls of hostility and lostness; a calling to be a free community witnessing to the world that Christ is Lord and that we can receive from him a freedom which the world cannot give. This calling is the heart of the matter. As we are obedient, Christ will provide the forms or structures we need.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf. Concept, Special Issue 4, July 1963. Two papers based on addresses to the conference were later published: H. J. Margull, 'Evangelism in Ecumenical Perspectives', and C. W. Williams, 'Evangelism and the Congregation', in The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XVI, January 1964, No.2, pp.133-152.

2. C. W. Williams, ibid., p.148.

3. Ibid., p.152.

In December 1963 the DWME met for the first world conference of the new Commission, in Mexico City, focusing on the theme 'Witness In Six Continents'. It was by then a familiar understanding that the 'home base' and the 'mission field' had become coextensive. The Asian churches had led the way in giving this reality concrete expression both by the way they accepted the responsibility for mission in their own lands and by their energetic undertakings in foreign mission.<sup>1</sup> But at Mexico a vital new element was added to discussions in that, for the first time, a world missionary conference included a substantial number of persons actively engaged in missionary work in Europe and North America. Representatives of 'home missions' were present in comparable strength to those representing 'foreign missions'. This fact, coupled with the early input from the 'Missionary Structure of the Congregation' study, meant that expert attention was at last turned to the specific problems of mission in the western world.<sup>2</sup>

Among the Reports from Mexico those of Sections II and III, on 'The Christian Witness to Men in the Secular World' and 'The Witness of the Congregation in its Neighbourhood', stood out as having particular significance. In the Report of Section II, after a highly suggestive series of affirmations on 'The Task of Mission', certain conclusions were drawn concerning the shape which mission ought to take. Implicit in the statement was the understanding that mission is truly a churchly activity. The missionary task falls to the specialized few only in the sense that the church as a whole is specially called from the world to participate in God's mission in the world.

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1. Cf. H.-R. Weber in H. E. Fey (ed.), op. cit., p.70.

2. Cf. L. Newbigin in H. E. Fey (ed.), op. cit., pp.193f.

'This concept of mission in the secular world has many immediate implications, as for example a fuller participation of the laity in world mission ... This new world demands greater ecumenical involvement on the part of the Churches ... If we take the situation of man in a secular world seriously, and understand that mission has to take place from within this world, our church structures including our missionary structures will need to undergo radical change. If we do not submit to God's loving hand we will surely receive his judgement. For the Church is to be the bearer of hope to the world, and is entrusted by God with this gift for the sake of the world.'<sup>1</sup>

In the Report of Section III there was, naturally enough, evidence of an appreciation of the sorts of analysis being conducted in the 'Missionary Structure of the Congregation' study. So it was observed that 'neighbourhood' could no longer be defined in residential terms alone since 'in modern cities and suburbs our lives often are intertwined less with those who reside near us than with those who are 'given' to us in other communities such as work, or recreation or politics'.<sup>2</sup> This new dimension of the 'neighbourhood' was taken to imply the need for correspondingly new forms of the 'congregation'. The Section at Mexico was more willing than those working on the new study of the Department on Studies in Evangelism to suggest new forms of congregational life.<sup>3</sup> Their enthusiasm and confidence was further expressed in the concluding words of their Report:

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1. R. K. Orchard (ed.), Witness In Six Continents, 'Records of the Meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches held in Mexico City, December 8-19, 1963', Edinburgh House Press, London, 1964, pp.154f.
  2. Ibid., p.156.
  3. Ibid., p.159. 'Cell' groups being formed in the new 'neighbourhoods' were suggested to be potentially a new form of congregation. Forms of congregation transcending the divisions of race, class and culture were encouraged. And an interesting mention was made of the new forms of church life emerging from the 'incredible awakening of the masses' in Latin America.

'We would affirm the need for 'responsible risk' in reaching out to the congregational forms needed if we are to be true witnesses to Christ in the contemporary world. The 'risk' we are called upon to take can be 'responsible', for we are not left without guidance as we venture out into a future which to us is uncertain. Christ is the Lord of the future, and it is an essential aspect of our witness to him that we should face the need for change without anxiety.'<sup>1</sup>

But in spite of their enthusiasm, and in spite of the general enthusiasm with which the Mexico Reports were received, the conference has not been without its critics. Bishop Anastasios, recalling his experience at the conference as a Greek Orthodox delegate, has described the way in which 'a somewhat naive optimistic enthusiasm expressed in repeated appeals for determined action' tended to obscure the hard reality that structural reform, urgent and necessary as it may be for the church's effective witness, could not alter the fact of the world's freedom to reject the gospel which the church proclaims.<sup>2</sup> David Bosch too, while acknowledging and welcoming the 'advantages' of the perspective of Mexico, has criticised its failure to deal adequately with the world's 'essentially negative stance towards mission'. He sees Mexico as the beginning of a broadening of the concept of mission, reaching its 'apex' at Uppsala in 1968, in which the Willingen concept of mission as the missio Dei was progressively misconstrued to imply a virtually unqualified solidarity with the world.<sup>3</sup> Bosch also

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1. Ibid., p.160.

2. Anastasios of Androussa, 'Mexico City 1963, Old Wine Into Fresh Wineskins', International Review of Mission, Vol. 67, No.267, July 1978, pp.355-364.

3. D. J. Bosch, Witness to the World - The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1980, pp.179f and 189f. Cf. also, R. C. Bassham, op. cit., p.332.

applies this criticism to the 'Missionary Structure of the Congregation' study in which the catch phrase 'the world sets the agenda' must be acknowledged to be fraught with theological difficulties:

'In the course of time the missio Dei concept underwent a metamorphosis. It was abridged to a mere theological preface to an anthropological text.'<sup>1</sup>

But even if Bosch is correct in maintaining that Mexico marked the beginning of a development which, while broadening the concept of mission, saw the WCC working from a dangerously shallow conception of the missio Dei,<sup>2</sup> the hard judgement on Uppsala does not apply with such force to the period with which we are presently concerned. An interesting paper in this respect is that of the Danish theologian Johannes Aagaard.<sup>3</sup> Writing not long after Mexico, Aagaard was not altogether satisfied with the lack of clarity in the ecumenical and Protestant missiological discussion at that time. But nonetheless he identified 'healthy results' and affirmed the importance of the movement for the church at that time in history. Commenting on the influence of the 'non-church theology' in the WCC and the WSCF, which he attributed to the personal influence of J. C. Hoekendijk, Aagaard wrote:

'The result of this movement is still a matter to be seen, but at any rate it has joined force with the older emphasis on the Missio Dei in such a way that it is now stressed with vigour and impatience that the church is only church when it is in movement, when it is sent and goes, when its 'notae' are those who were the 'notae' of its Lord and His apostles, i.e. suffering, service, witness, community, peace.'<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.242.

2. Ibid., p.189f.

3. J. Aagaard, 'Some Main Trends In Modern Protestant Missiology', Studia Theologica, Vol. 19, 1965, pp.238-259.

4. Ibid., p.249.



And in his concluding remarks Aagaard offered a guarded endorsement of the movement, and a less guarded affirmation of its importance for the future of the church:

'This whole radical approach in its attempt to get out of the houses of Egypt may look very alarming, and some of its expressions probably are very alarming. As a whole it must first of all be understood as a longing for a genuine renewal of the church and its mission.

Words about renewal are many but real actions are rare. One cannot go on speaking the right words without doing them. The churches seem to do that. If so - at any rate some people will get up and do the right thing - or at any rate something - without having a clear understanding of what they are doing. Frustrated renewal may end up as a serious exodus - not only from the houses of Egypt, but from the House of God.'<sup>1</sup>

(iii) The 'essential issues' for the uniting churches

It would be inappropriate to offer a propositional summary of the convergence of missiological and ecclesiological thought between Willingen and Mexico, since there was at the time a deliberate reticence to fabricate a new communis opinio pre-empting the outcome of the 'experimental' thought and action which surrounded the movement.<sup>2</sup> But it is possible to identify a central emphasis which was afforded a consensus of assent in the ecumenical movement. The implications of this emphasis needed to be worked out in a manner appropriate to the particular circumstances of particular churches. The Reports and

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1. Ibid., p.259.

2. J. Aagaard, ibid., p.249, observed that one of the 'healthy results' of the atmosphere of uncertainty in the period after Willingen was its 'hindering the worst expressions of epigons!'.<sup>2</sup>

Proposed Basis of Union of the Australian Joint Commission represented an exercise of this nature.

Central to ecumenical discussion between 1952 and 1963 was the understanding that mission is of the very essence of the church. Its nature and function are held together in that in both respects the church is missionary. But this missionary perspective demands that ecclesiological questions (such as were raised in the Australian church union negotiations) must be approached 'indirectly';<sup>1</sup> the church's self-interest becomes an ex-centric enquiry.<sup>2</sup> The subject of mission is God, the object the world, and thus the church is missionary always and only in relation to God's call and in relation to its being directed towards the world. The radical and humiliating truth in this is that there is nothing in the church which is either of itself or for its own sake - the church is a servant. This further implies that the ecclesiological question is necessarily and sufficiently answered according to the categories of obedience and service, or better, the twin-category of obedient service. The church must be obedient to the call of God - an obedience expressed in the struggle to be effectively engaged in the world, in the service of God. From listening post to work place, in its worship, witness, and service, the missionary church is in movement.

This emphasis, which was dominant in the ecumenical movement at that time, was clearly to the fore in the work of the Australian Joint Commission. In the Introduction to the Second Report, which included the Proposed Basis of Union, the Commission offered

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1. Cf. C. Williams, The Church, op. cit., p.16.

2. The pun is unintentional, but appropriate.

suggestions on 'The Way to an Informed Vote'. In the concluding paragraph of that section the Commission identified the conviction which conditioned their understanding of the task facing the uniting churches - a conviction which called into play the twin category of obedience to God expressed in the service of God in the world:

'It is the deep conviction of the Commission that God is calling our churches into union with each other as one step in His plan to bring to His divided church a growing unity which will express to the world the reality of His reconciling love. Together with this unity must come a renewal of the Church's faith and life. Preparing for union, by intelligent participation in the process that leads to the vote, can be the occasion by which God renews us all in His knowledge and love, and prepares us for a more effective fulfilment of our mission to the world.'<sup>1</sup>

Taken in the context of the whole of the Commission's Reports, which we have already discussed in some detail, we find in this paragraph a useful summary of the 'essential issues' according to which the scheme set forth in the Proposed Basis of Union was to be understood and evaluated. In the first place it was affirmed that church union is a missionary imperative, or an obligation incumbent on the missionary church. This was seen to be the case both in the sense that, according to their 'deep conviction', union is a response to God's call, and in the sense that they perceived union to be related to the church's directedness towards the world, to which it must demonstrate 'the reality of His reconciling love'.

In the second place, it is interesting to notice the ex-centric approach which the Commission took to the matter of the renewal of the

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.11.

church which they saw as being bound up with union. It was not a case of the church renewing itself, nor of its renewal being for its own sake. The renewal of the church was seen as being neither of nor for itself. Rather, looking beyond the bounds of the church in itself, the Commission affirmed that the preparations for union 'can' be a process in which God renews his church so that it be directed anew towards the world in mission.

The 'new forms of obedience' set forth in the Proposed Basis of Union - which included the alarming novelties of episcopacy and the Concordat, and also the more palatably contemporary emphasis on and provision for the ministry of the whole people of God and the reciprocity between lay and ordained ministry - could not be evaluated by a synoptic treatment of the constitutions of the three churches : by an ecclesiological introspection. They could be judged only in the same manner as they were developed and proposed : by a listening for the call of God and by being directed towards the world in missionary concern. The essential criterion of judgement was that of missionary obedience.

But more than this, even the apparently 'old' forms of obedience for which provision was made in the Proposed Basis of Union - the affirmation of the authority of Scripture and Creed, the acknowledgment of the witness of the Reformation Confessions and the teaching of Wesley, the observation of the two sacraments, the perpetuation of the three-fold responsibility of the ministry of the Word, Sacraments and Pastoral Care, and the continuation of the representative church courts familiar to the uniting churches - could be evaluated only according to the criterion of missionary obedience. These were presented not as tautological conclusions from the doctrinal and

constitutional premises brought to the negotiations by the three churches. They were called forth, demanded even, by virtue of their continuing functional significance in the missionary church.

## Section Two

### The Response to the Proposed Basis of Union

- (i) Setting the 'essential issues' before the uniting churches
- (ii) The response to the proposed doctrinal standards
- (iii) Deacons?
- (iv) Presbyters?
- (v) Bishops and a Concordat with the Church of South India?

(i) Setting the 'essential issues' before the uniting churches

The Methodist General Conference was the first of the federal courts to deal with the Proposed Basis of Union. In his Conference Sermon, in May 1963, the President-General, W. Frank Hambly, took the opportunity to bridge the gap between the private deliberations of the Commission, of which he was a member, and the general discussion of their findings in the church; to transpose their understanding of the ecumenical task from the key suitable to the Commission to a key within the range of the courts and congregations which were to take up the 'song'. And it was appropriate that preaching be the vehicle for this transposition.

Though perhaps taking certain exegetical liberties, Hambly chose to preach on texts from I Corinthians 15. From verse 36 he called the Conference to accept that 'entering into union involves a dying to live more fully'.<sup>1</sup> Driving home the point he argued that indeed 'Only if in some way Methodism dies to live again shall Christianity in greater fullness flourish'.<sup>2</sup> Further, from verse 38, he argued that as they faced a fresh consideration of the structuring of the church it must be remembered that the form of the church is properly 'chosen by God, not devised by man'; or more precisely, that God's call to mission must be determinative of the form of the church. In his concluding remarks Hambly presented the Conference with the convictions that were

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1. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, 'Authorized by the Methodist General Conference Committee on Church Union at the request of the General Conference Standing Committee, 1964', The Methodist Publishing House (Aldersgate Press), Melbourne et al., 1964, p.9.
  2. Ibid., p.10.

at the heart of the Commission's proposals. Hambly offered a concise and clearly stated summary of what the Commission believed to be the 'essential issues' to which the uniting churches were called to respond and according to which the Proposed Basis was to be evaluated:

'... We must always be looking for the fullness of the unity which God wills for all His people. We must never expect, at any stage on the way to the final unity we seek, that we shall be able to avoid looking beyond this stage to the next, and even beyond that. As we take action in the present, we must dare in faith to set forth something of what we believe to be the shape of things to come.

... God is not calling us to come together simply for our own sake, but primarily for His. Every action which more clearly affirms the Church's unity in mission is a proper response to God's offer of unity to His people.

... This call to union is a summons to know God more fully and to see His way more clearly. It is the awareness that, in our division, we know God less perfectly than we shall know Him in a fuller union, which gives us the confidence to go out adventurously upon what must be, in great measure, an unknown way. As we go on in faith, He will give to His Church the body of His choice to enable her to do His will in the world, here and now.<sup>1</sup>

As the Commission had hoped, much attention was given to the 'essential issues' as the churches began to discuss the Proposed Basis. The discussion, as far as can be judged from the surviving publications from the period, was as much devoted to theological as to constitutional questions; it was as much ecclesiological as ecclesiastical in tone. For example, when Eric F. Osborne responded in print to the Proposed Basis, he made it clear that his booklet was 'concerned with the basic issues which are before us, rather than the exact detail of the Basis

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1. Ibid., p.12.



of Union',<sup>1</sup> prefacing his thoroughly theological treatment of the question of union with the explanation:

'I believe that life in the Uniting Churches offers a special opportunity of discovery and renewal. Controversial issues can so dominate discussion as to confuse issues which are central.'<sup>2</sup>

In the course of his booklet, which appropriately displayed a preacher's penchant for illustration and anecdote in the development of an argument, Osborne repeatedly focused attention on the principal matter which he saw to be before the uniting churches:

'The challenge of Christian unity is the challenge of the mission of the Church, that the Word should be proclaimed, that God's love should be made known in these days as in days gone by.'<sup>3</sup>

It was of course both impossible and undesirable that discussion remain at this level. The proposals themselves needed to be discussed in detail, and evaluated as the suggested means by which the uniting churches might respond to the call of God. But again, in the Introductions, Explanations, and Handbooks dealing with the Proposed Basis, much care was taken to avoid the obscuring of the 'essential issues'. Ian Gillman, for example, seeking to help congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland to turn their pragmatic eye to the visionary proposals of the Commission, saw the necessity of explaining the methodology which gave rise to them. In one pamphlet he addressed

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1. E. F. Osborne, Church Union Now, The Methodist Publishing House (Aldersgate Press), Melbourne et al., 1964, p.7.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.27.

the question, 'How was the Proposed Basis arrived at?', and supplied the answer, so simple after the event but so contentious immediately before the decision of 1957:

'It was decided that we were not to be presented with a basis made up of features drawn from each of the three churches. The Joint Commission set out to discover together what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today, and to frame the basis in the light of what they heard. It was to be a venture in reform and renewal rather than an 'amalgam' of features of each of the churches.'<sup>1</sup>

And again, describing the difference between this and previous Australian bases of union, Gillman offered a succinct description of the indirect approach to ecclesiology which the Commission had adopted. And the methodology needed to be explained, not just because it might be unfamiliar, but because it was the key to a real understanding and informed evaluation of the proposals:

'On this occasion it was decided to adopt a different approach. This was to begin with a new and sustained listening to what God is saying to his people here and now. If the Church is to be God's faithful and obedient servant people today what must she be like? If she is to be an effective ambassador for Christ within Australia and in this part of the world how must she be organised?'<sup>2</sup>

This description represented precisely the ex-centric nature of the ecclesiological enquiry as it had been newly understood, and in a series of questions which Gillman offered for discussion he provided

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1. I. Gillman, A First Introduction To The Proposed Basis Of Union For The Presbyterians, 'For the Committee on Christian Unity Prepared for the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland', Smith and Paterson, Brisbane, (undated, circa 1964), p.1.
  2. I. Gillman, Grappling With The Proposed Basis of Union, 'Prepared for the Committee on Christian Unity of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland', Smith and Paterson, Brisbane, (undated, circa 1965), p.2.

a framework by which groups and individuals could engage in such an enquiry for themselves as a means of evaluating the Proposed Basis.<sup>1</sup>

Though varying in theological and pedagogical quality, other Guides and Study Books took similar pains to help the people of the uniting churches to uncover the 'essential issues' which were at the heart of the proposals before them. In a series of studies prepared for a combined Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian youth conference, in the summer of 1964/65, later re-edited for use in local groups, the Introduction was devoted entirely to the Commission's methodology and to their conviction that 'The way into union is by the rhythm of the Gospel'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Commentary prepared for guiding discussion among Presbyterians focused its first two chapters on the 'Preface' and the paragraph headed 'The Decision To Unite' from the Proposed Basis of Union, which dealt with the theological undergirding of the Commission's method.<sup>3</sup>

That these strenuous efforts to put before the people of the uniting churches the 'essential issues' were not without effect is demonstrated in that publications opposing union were forced to at least purport to attack the proposals on those grounds. For example, after the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, in 1964, 'committees' were set up in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney for the purpose of representing the case against union to

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1. Ibid., pp.2f.

2. Called Together - Studies In Church Union In Australia, The Joint Board of Graded Lessons of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, 1965, pp.4f.

3. Towards Understanding - A Commentary, With Questions, On The Proposed Basis of Union, Prepared For Presbyterians, The Committee on Christian Unity, The Presbyterian Church of Australia, Sydney, 1965, pp.7-9.

Presbyterians. In an anonymous booklet published on their behalf we may identify the way in which they were forced to argue. To begin with, the observation was made:

'The desire for unity has ... a missionary and evangelical motive. Particular unions are justified when they result, or promise to result, in the greater effectiveness of Christ's 'witnesses and servants'. The same motive may properly justify a reluctance or refusal to participate in a particular union of churches.'<sup>1</sup>

But having identified the central issue, and having suggested that the Commission's proposals might be criticised on this issue, the argument on these lines was suddenly dropped in favour of a more advantageous line of attack:

'We are here concerned with the possibility of uniting into one church the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Australia ... Can a basis of union be found upon which all three may unite with sincerity and the assurance that it will increase effectiveness in witnessing and serving the Lord of the Church? ... We here consider whether the proposed Basis of Union does any violence to the faith, order and discipline of the Presbyterian Church as we know it. WE BELIEVE IT DOES.'<sup>2</sup>

In what followed in the booklet, the cover of which was emblazoned with no less than seventeen imprints of the insignia of the Presbyterian church, the argument was developed that the proposed Uniting Church in Australia would not be an essentially unchanged Presbyterian Church of

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1. The Other Side - A Critical Discussion of the Joint Commission's Proposed Basis of Union, Arthur B. Harding, Preston, (undated, circa 1965), p.6.
  2. Ibid., p.7. (Block lettering in original text.)

Australia under a new name, and should therefore be rejected by Presbyterians. The 'essential issues' went unconsidered and untested, and another issue, a non-issue since 1957, was introduced as safer ground for debate. There was no thought of Hambly's 'dying to live more fully' here.

(ii) The response to the proposed doctrinal standards

Although there is evidence of this kind of polarization in the debate over the Proposed Basis of Union, a polarization in which opposing parties argued at cross-purposes and in which no real communication took place, it is the largely non-polemical tone of the discussion which is its most striking feature. The published evidence suggests that there was in fact a certain consensus of agreement on what were the real issues before the churches, such that discussion concentrated on whether the Commission's proposals represented the most appropriate response to these issues.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly most interest was directed towards the proposals for ministry and the sort of ecumenical and international commitment expressed in the suggested Concordat, but some lively discussion of the proposed doctrinal standards was also a feature, especially in the Presbyterian church. The agreement reached in the First Report was embodied in the Proposed Basis of Union in Section III.1, 'Concerning

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1. Sociological studies on Australian religious life and attitudes, conducted during the sixties and early seventies, suggest that this impression might be somewhat deceptive, or at least that it represents an anomaly. We will consider the findings and implications of these studies below.

Doctrinal Standards', and Section V, 'A Confessing Act'.<sup>1</sup> The former described the doctrinal norms of the Uniting Church with reference to Scripture, Creed and Confession. The latter was framed for use in 'all Services of Inauguration or Recognition', with the understanding that the statement would subsequently be afforded 'such authority as the Church recognises within it as she judges it in the light of God's Word'.<sup>2</sup>

In keeping with the spirit of the First Report, the emphasis of these doctrinal statements was less on defining the faith than on describing where the faith may be found. The statements were framed in such a way as to impel the Uniting Church to be as much a confessing as a confessional church. Priority was given to the Scriptures which:

'... contain all things necessary to salvation; they announce to us the Name and Purpose of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and declare the mighty acts of God in reconciling the world through Jesus Christ, who alone without qualification can be called the Word of God. The Church's message is controlled by the Word spoken in Jesus Christ and mediated through Holy Scripture, which is the unique earthly instrument through which the Church hears the living Word, and the decisive measure by which her life on earth is tested and through which it is renewed.'<sup>3</sup>

As 'authoritative statements of the faith and as safeguards to the right understanding thereof', it was proposed that the Uniting Church

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.77f. and 88.
  2. Ibid., p.88.
  3. Ibid., pp.77f.

'confess' the Catholic Faith as set forth in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, and also the Chalcedonian Decree. It was seen that these may be open to 'subsequent clarification and interpretation by the Church Catholic', their verbal form being historically conditioned.<sup>1</sup> Further, as witnesses to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, the Reformation's 'essential contribution to the catholic formulation of the faith', the statement 'acknowledges' and gives an 'honoured place in its life and thought' to the First Scots Confession of Faith, the Second Helvetic Confession of Faith, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Savoy Declaration and John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons.<sup>2</sup> Emphasising the normative authority and function of Scripture, the proposals further provided this impressively broadened creedal and confessional basis by which the Uniting Church might be related (constitutionally) to the faith in the widest sense and through which the Uniting Church might relate itself (dynamically) to the faith of the church. The Commission's concept of doctrinal standards involved a fidelity to the witness of the past which impels witness to the faith in the present.

The absence of a 'subordinate standard', in lieu of which was included a 'Confessing Act', was indicative of the Commission's view of doctrinal standards; the relationship between churches and the faith of the church. To be confessional is not enough; churches must themselves confess. But the lack of definition in this doctrinal stance was a cause of concern for some.

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1. Ibid., p.78.

2. Ibid.

A most interesting booklet in this respect was that written by J. H. Gowdie,<sup>1</sup> a Presbyterian minister at Dubbo in New South Wales. Displaying a great enthusiasm for the prospect of union with the Congregational and Methodist churches, and also for the enlarged concept of the ecumenical task developed by the Joint Commission, Gowdie endorsed the hopes and aspirations embodied in the name 'The Uniting Church in Australia' - though confessing that 'I shudder at the prospect of endless corny jokes at wedding breakfasts'. In his first chapter Gowdie wrote:

'As the Basis of Union now stands, the proposed Uniting Church does not have as its Subordinate Standard the Confessional Statement of any Reformed Church. Nor does it claim to 'adhere to' the Reformation. Its avowed purpose is to be something quite other than a 'United Protestant' Church dedicated either to perpetuating division or to warfare with others of the one family of faith. In seeking to express the fullness of Christian Faith it declares its conviction that it must seek to enter into the fullness of Christian Fellowship. All this I accept freely, gladly, hopefully.'<sup>2</sup>

But Gowdie went on to explain why he felt compelled to prepare a critique of the Proposed Basis:

'But in our reaching out to others we must not let ourselves forget the things God has done for us in our history and given us in our experience. Nor dare we forget that the Reformation was one of God's mighty saving acts ... Great care should therefore have been taken, in setting out doctrinal standards, to see that every vital evangelical principle restored

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1. J. H. Gowdie, An Evangelical Catholic Church - A constructive criticism of the Basis of Union proposed for the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in Australia, Dubbo Printing Works, Dubbo, 1964.
  2. Ibid., p.5.



through the Reformation was given clear expression ... (and) to see that no opening was left for our return to erroneous doctrines and wrong practices ... Such care was not taken.<sup>1</sup>

Gowdie pointed out that after union the Basis would be applied without reference to the explanatory Reports of the Commission, the latter being afforded no constitutional status. He argued that therefore 'all necessary safeguards against misinterpretation' needed to be written into the Basis itself. But his concern was not only for the Uniting Church's own clear understanding of what it believes. Gowdie also saw the potential for wider union being eroded if other churches could not precisely identify what the Uniting Church believes. Having detailed his criticisms of the Proposed Basis, Gowdie set out an outline of a statement, which he adapted from the Basis of Union of the Church of South India, to replace the Proposed Basis.

It is not necessary for our purposes to conduct a close analysis of Gowdie's arguments. It is more interesting to observe that his points of criticism of the doctrinal statements in the Proposed Basis were essentially the same as, for example, the mildly cautionary comments of Ian Gillman,<sup>2</sup> the pragmatic considerations of Harold Wood,<sup>3</sup> the pastoral observations of the Methodist Committee on Church Union,<sup>4</sup> and even the alarmed objections of the anonymous Presbyterian 'committees' mentioned earlier.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.5f.

2. I. Gillman, Grappling with the Proposed Basis of Union, op. cit., pp.4f.

3. A. H. Wood, The Proposed Basis of Union Explained for Methodists, Spectator Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., Melbourne, 1965, pp.7 and 16.

4. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., p.23.

5. The Other Side, op. cit., pp.14-18.

Briefly then, Gowdie wished to see an adequate statement of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Acknowledging that it was understood and perhaps even implied in the Proposed Basis, he nonetheless argued that further ecumenical progress, in particular towards Roman Catholics, would follow a course of compromise in this respect unless the doctrine was clearly set forth. Making more than just an etymological comment, he suggested that 'Unless clear provision is made to prevent the contraction of the word, 'presbyter' will again become 'priest''.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Gowdie argued that it was necessary not only to affirm that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith belongs to the 'catholic formulation of the faith', but also to declare forthrightly what that doctrine is.<sup>2</sup> He also insisted that with respect to Scripture there be the acknowledgement that 'the authentication of its truth and authority is the inward work of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>3</sup> And further, he led the chorus of voices which wondered at the purpose and questioned the advisability of the inclusion in the creedal confession of the Chalcedonian Decree which 'enshrines the disastrous and dangerous word 'theotokos''. The doctrine of the two natures of Christ could be adequately maintained by referring to the Savoy Declaration, the Westminster Confession or even the Thirty-Nine Articles. It was at best to introduce a red herring, at worst to threaten the purity of worship, to adopt the Chalcedonian Decree with its aroma of Mariolatry.<sup>4</sup>

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1. J. H. Gowdie, op. cit., pp.7f.

2. Ibid., p.9.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., pp.13-15.

Gowdie touched on almost every point of concern which was raised in the various publications which discussed the doctrinal standards set down in the Proposed Basis. And it is interesting that he was able to do so. He was certainly an enthusiastic, even a radical, ecumenist. His concern over what he saw as the potential compromise of Reformation doctrine in fact appeared to arise from a hope that closer relations with other churches would eventually be possible; particularly with Anglicans, and perhaps also with Roman Catholics. But this enthusiastic ecumenist put forward concerns which were emerging also from more moderate and even conservative quarters.

Here we can once again identify a certain consensus which was forming in the uniting churches. It is fair to say that there was a general satisfaction with the intention of the statements on doctrine; there was a willingness to respond to the call to be a confessing church. But there was also a desire to have a more precise confessional grounding than was provided in the Proposed Basis of Union. For a variety of reasons - some related to a sense of loyalty to and concurrence with confessional tradition, some related to pragmatic concerns for the success of the immediate union and the catechetical responsibilities to be fulfilled within the Uniting Church, some related to the hope for wider unity - there was a desire for a Basis of Union which had more to say about what it was that the Uniting Church actually believed.

(iii) Deacons?

The Commission's emphasis on the ministry of the whole church and its every member provoked little dispute; at least where it was explicitly expressed in the Proposed Basis of Union. There was no serious dissent from the view that the whole church 'is called to participate in the ministry of Christ and to carry out that ministry in the world'.<sup>1</sup> Few commentators even saw the need to amplify this affirmation; one exception being Ian Gillman who wrote:

'This 'ministry in the world' is the task of all God's people and it is to be made real in every sphere of life, with a telling relevance arising from a sensitive awareness of the society in which we live, study, work, and play.'<sup>2</sup>

Nor did the affirmation that 'To prepare each member rightly to use the gifts he has received ... particular ministries are granted to the Church'<sup>3</sup> prove a bone of contention. That there was a 'ministry of the laity', and that there was an essential inter-relation between lay ministry and ordained ministry, was generally agreed.<sup>4</sup> But as the Proposed Basis of Union passed from the conference table to the coffee table, so to speak, one matter stood out as commanding attention. The Methodist Handbook identified the issue accurately and concisely:

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.81.
  2. I. Gillman, Grappling With The Proposed Basis of Union, op. cit., p.7; cf. A. H. Wood, The Proposed Basis Of Union Explained For Methodists, op. cit., p.4.
  3. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.81.
  4. Cf. the Report of the General Conference Commission on the 'Ministry of the Church' in the Minutes of the 20th General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia, 1963, Appendix L.

'The proposals in the Basis of Union that in the Uniting Church there shall be Deacons, Presbyters and Bishops has given rise to honest questioning.'<sup>1</sup>

The proposals concerning deacons created some puzzlement; primarily because it was not altogether clear what a deacon was supposed to be and do. As we have already observed, this lack of clarity was perhaps inevitable given the nature of the diaconal office historically and the inconclusive results of the discussion of the diaconate in the wider ecumenical movement at that time. The question was further complicated by the fact that, although in some respects the proposed office was not unlike those already filled by representative laity in the uniting churches, the deacon was patently not the same as a Presbyterian elder, a Methodist local preacher, nor even a Congregational deacon. The Proposed Basis' affirmation that the ordination of deacons 'implies a limited but genuine participation' in the ministry of the Word served only to cloud the issue.<sup>2</sup> The Presbyterian Commentary asked dryly, given the emphasis on the ministry of the whole church, 'Do all members have a genuine but limited participation in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments?'<sup>3</sup> And later it exposed the unanswered questions more directly:

'What are the specific responsibilities of deacons if they have a genuine participation in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments? Who determines the limitations of their participation - when and how do they participate?'<sup>4</sup>

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1. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., p.27.
  2. When I asked Colin Williams what was meant by the phrase 'a limited but genuine participation', he explained that it had been a compromise with the 'High' Presbyterians who insisted that deacons ought not to be permitted to administer the eucharist.
  3. Towards Understanding, op. cit., p.13.
  4. Ibid., p.17; cf. I. Gillman, Grappling With The Proposed Basis of Union, op. cit., p.11.

Outright rejection of the proposals concerning deacons was not general, but a call for clarification of this, 'the most complex problem in the proposed structure',<sup>1</sup> was. Harold Wood, seeing the general proposal as one of the 'excellent features'<sup>2</sup> of the Basis, welcomed it as an 'opportunity given to worthy men and women'.<sup>3</sup> But he expressed concern that even though the title 'Local Preacher' would lapse, 'the right of laymen to preach, after due preparation and commissioning, should not lapse, either now or in the future'.<sup>4</sup> Wood further suggested that the ministry of deaconesses was not sufficiently provided for by bringing them under the general title of 'deacon'. He argued that the special ministry of deaconesses should be recognised 'and/or' a specific provision be made for women to be ordained as presbyters.<sup>5</sup>

There was a note of alarm sounded in certain Presbyterian publications also. Just as the Proposed Basis had found it sufficient to afford the local preacher and deaconess the right of continuing their ministry in the Uniting Church as deacons, no provision being made for the future commissioning of men and women to fulfil these particular functions, the elder too received this somewhat perfunctory treatment. If Methodists treasured their local preacher, and justifiably so, the ruling elder had been a touchstone of Presbyterianism and the kirk

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1. Towards Understanding, op. cit., p.16.
  2. A. H. Wood, The Proposed Basis Of Union Explained For Methodists, op. cit., p.4.
  3. Ibid., p.12.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Ibid., p.13. Deaconesses served in each of the uniting churches, and a concern for the future of this ministry was not restricted to Methodists. The Faith and Order Commission of the Methodist Church was independently considering the question of deacons at this time, but with a consciousness of the relevance of their study to the proposed union. See, The Methodist Church of Australasia, Minutes of the Twentieth General Conference, 1963, p.69; and Minutes of the Twenty-First General Conference, 1966, p.165.

session an integral part of the life and ministry of the Presbyterian congregation. There was no doubt that the proposed deacons were not elders, nor that the proposed parish council was not a session, but there was some doubt as to whether the mission of the church would be better served by deacons than elders and by parish councils than by kirk sessions.<sup>1</sup>

The real stumbling block in the proposals concerning deacons was their lack of clarity. It was clear that the specific functions of ministry to which lay people had been commissioned in the uniting churches were not to be perpetuated in the Uniting Church. The uniting churches assigned specific jobs, 'jobs of work' even, to representative lay people - the job of elder, local preacher, deaconess and deacon. These were now to be replaced. But it was not clear by what they were to be replaced.

In spite of the emphasis on the ministry of the whole church in the Proposed Basis, an emphasis generally welcomed by its readers, it was nowhere spelt out just what representative lay people would actually do in the Uniting Church. Rather, the uniting churches were offered the office of deacon, the function of which was unclear and the status of which was unclear. There was no 'job description' for deacons like the detailed description given of the duties of presbyters and the more general description of the function of bishops. Also it was not actually clear whether the office of deacon was 'lay' or 'ordained'; in fact, that it was the latter was the strongest

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1. Cf. J. H. Gowdie, op. cit., pp.16f; The Other Side, op. cit., pp.11f, 23 and 30f; Towards Understanding, op. cit., p.19.

impression.<sup>1</sup> The people of the uniting churches knew what they were losing, but were unsure of what it was that was being offered in return. The general response to the proposals concerning deacons was a request for more information, but together with an expression of foreboding at what was being interpreted as making for the atrophy of effective lay ministry.

(iv) Presbyters?

While the proposals concerning deacons represented an innovation and a departure from familiar patterns of church life, those dealing with presbyters essentially provided for the perpetuation of an existing office common to the uniting churches. This being so, the proposals as such proved uncontentious. Once it was understood, after a perusal of the duties of a presbyter listed in the Proposed Basis,<sup>2</sup> that a 'presbyter' was actually intended to fulfil the functions of a minister of the Word and Sacraments, the new name caused little concern.<sup>3</sup> Harold Wood predicted that it was likely that the name 'presbyter' would be mainly used for 'documentary and official purposes' while 'minister' would persist in general usage.<sup>4</sup> The point of the new title was well taken,<sup>5</sup> but in practice it was neither here nor there.

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1. Cf. J. H. Gowdie, op. cit., pp.17 and 23f.

2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.52.

3. We mentioned the criticism of J. H. Gowdie, op. cit., p.8, but this was related more to the lack of doctrinal definition in the Proposed Basis than to the change of name itself.

4. A. H. Wood, The Proposed Basis Of Union Explained For Methodists, op. cit., p.10.

5. Cf. ibid; I. Gillman, Grappling With The Proposed Basis Of Union, op. cit., pp.8f; Towards Understanding, op. cit., p.14.



Neither did the emphasis which the Second Report placed on the facilitative function of the presbyter within a congregation provoke debate. While this emphasis was admittedly given a more oblique expression in the Proposed Basis, it may be thought noteworthy that the surviving published evidence offers no comment, approving or disapproving, on this implication of the affirmation of the ministry of the whole church for the ministry of the presbyter.

The theological and linguistic niceties of the Commission's formulation were apparently taken with a grain of salt by the readers of their proposals. Such subtleties were the business of theologians. This is not to say that 'essential issues' were ignored, but that they were taken to be issues of practical significance. Certainly the missionary emphasis in these discussions was intended to find practical expression. The question of interest to the uniting churches therefore was one of what difference the proposals concerning presbyters would make in practice. Where the proposals were understood as making no difference, in the sense of perpetuating and possibly refining the function of ministers of the Word and Sacraments, no comment was offered. But where the proposals suggested actual change, responses were forthcoming. What was explicitly stated in the proposals concerning presbyters received silent assent. But again, it was in what was left unsaid that implicit change was perceived, and it was to this that commentators responded.

According to the Proposed Basis, ministers of the Word and Sacraments in good standing in the particular uniting churches would be 'acknowledged as presbyters in the Uniting Church'.<sup>1</sup> Since the

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, p.83.

Congregational church only was served by women in the ordained ministry, this meant that Methodists and Presbyterians entering the Uniting Church would for the first time have women exercising this function in their church. This innovation, made without comment or explanation in either the Reports or the Proposed Basis, received an immediate response. Although 'The Other Side', condemned the reform, saying that:

'... the proposed Basis radically departs from both New Testament and Catholic teaching and practice in its surreptitious introduction, without any discussion, of women into the ministry ... Quite obviously the norm is expediency and not Scripture.'<sup>1</sup>

other commentators were better disposed to the idea. As we saw above, Harold Wood in fact saw the lack of specific provision for the ordination of women to the office of presbyter as a shortcoming of the Proposed Basis.<sup>2</sup> He suggested that it was anomalous that women be accepted as presbyters in the first instance, by virtue of their ordination as ministers of the Congregational church, but that there was no provision for the future ordination of women to this office in the Uniting Church.<sup>3</sup> Though holding an opposite opinion to the Presbyterian anti-union lobby, Wood too regretted that the matter had not been dealt with more directly. Whether or not the Methodist and Presbyterian churches were ready to discuss the question of the ordination of women, the Proposed Basis had forced the issue, either by

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1. The Other Side, op. cit., p.22.

2. A. H. Wood, The Proposed Basis Of Union Explained For Methodists, op. cit., p.13.

3. Ibid., p.10.

oversight or intent, but without offering any guidelines for the consideration of the matter. 'What do you think of this proposal?'<sup>1</sup> asked one commentator, and let the matter stand at that.

Questions were also raised in response to the proposal that in the Uniting Church not only the presbyter but also the bishop would be charged with certain liturgical and pastoral responsibilities towards the congregation. The Proposed Basis included in the function of bishops a responsibility for:

'... the proper sacramental and liturgical life of the churches committed to his care; the ordination of presbyters and deacons and confirmation of the faithful.'<sup>2</sup>

The exercise of this function was conditioned by the requirement that 'in matters such as ordination, confirmation and pastoral discipline' bishops would only act with the 'authority of the Presbytery'.<sup>3</sup> However the Proposed Basis neither defined this 'authority' nor indicated how it would be apportioned. Although there was no explicit proposal to the effect, it was taken that this implied, or at least left room for, the limitation of what had been hitherto within the initiative of the local minister.

Although the presbyter was charged with the duty to 'instruct the young and prepare candidates for confirmation',<sup>4</sup> the rite of confirmation was now to be 'by prayer with the laying on of hands of a bishop

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1. I. Gillman, Grappling With The Proposed Basis Of Union, op. cit., p.11.
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.83.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid., p.82.

or presbyter'.<sup>1</sup> Ordination to the office of deacon was also to be at the hands of 'a bishop or presbyter'.<sup>2</sup> And the ordination of presbyters was to include 'the laying on of hands by a bishop and at least three presbyters'.<sup>3</sup> These proposals suggested, especially to some Presbyterians, that the right of presbyters to confirm, and to ordain deacons was 'placed in doubt'.<sup>4</sup> The Presbyterian Commentary found it necessary to point out also that the proposals departed from their familiar procedure in which the ordination of ministers was 'by a decision of a presbytery and by the laying on of hands of all ministerial members of the presbytery'.<sup>5</sup> The impression was gained that the rights of local ministers, and also of presbyteries, had been compromised. But as the proposals stood they neither confirmed nor contradicted this impression.

It is important to recognise, however, that even where these implications were identified and the question put, there was generally no immediate rejection of the proposals. Rather, it was suggested that even these changes to the familiar function of the ordained ministry might be acceptable, if only they would be spelt out clearly and with a reasonable explanation and justification.<sup>6</sup> If the missionary calling of the church required that changes be made, then let them be made. But such changes should be made deliberately and responsibly,

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1. Ibid., p.80.

2. Ibid., p.84.

3. Ibid., p.82.

4. Cf. I. Gillman, Grappling With The Proposed Basis Of Union, op. cit., p.11. Congregationalists too had cause for concern here. The proposals seemed to do violence to their understanding of ordination, and their practice of the active participation of the congregation in the rite. Cf. 'The Cambridge Platform', Chapter IX, in W. Walker (ed.), The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1893, pp.215-217.

5. Towards Understanding, op. cit., p.14.

6. Cf. ibid., p.15.

and the Basis of Union should provide for such conscious reform in response to the call of God.

(v) Bishops and a Concordat with the Church of South India?

The topics which excited the most energetic and earnest discussion in the uniting churches were the proposals concerning bishops and the related proposals concerning the Concordat with the Church of South India. In some ways this discussion was more cohesive than that of other proposals. The orderly identification and representation of the intention and practical outworking of the proposals, the scrupulously even-handed recognition of contending points of view, and the disciplined avoidance of tangential issues all belied the arresting novelty of these unprecedented and unexpected proposals.

It was not only that the characteristically taciturn Australians covered their initial surprise with the more calculated response of coolly rational and practical analysis and evaluation, but more importantly, before it had even been published the Second Report had already set down the lines of debate. On the one hand, the body of the Report had included a detailed explanation and justification of the proposals. On the other hand, the appended Reservation had expressed a dissenting view which managed to challenge the particular proposals, and the supporting argument, while still endorsing the rest of the proposals and the general thrust of the Commission's recommendations. The Commission had done the uniting churches, and the cause of union, a great service by making public not only the conclusions reached by a majority decision, but also the reservations of a dissenting minority within the Commission itself.

There is ample evidence that the open discussion in the Second Report and Reservation was determinative in guiding the consideration of the proposals in the uniting churches. This is demonstrated, for example, in that two widely used booklets went so far as to stage a dialogue between proponents and reservationists.<sup>1</sup> Two features of these 'dialogues' warrant mention. First, in neither case was any new argument introduced but both publications found it sufficient to reiterate and restate the two points of view put forward in the Second Report and Reservation.<sup>2</sup> It needs to be said that this did not render the exercise redundant, but rather, the worthy representation and clear expression of the opposing cases made it less likely that the divergent opinions in the Commission's Report could be misconstrued. Second, in both cases, after very frank 'exchanges', the 'conversation' wound up on a conciliatory note. The Methodist Handbook concluded with the words, 'Now is the time for Methodists to remember Wesley's dictum : 'Methodists are the friends of all, the enemies of none''.<sup>3</sup> The Joint Board's contribution had each side making an identical concluding statement: 'The most important issue of all is to listen to what God is saying to us through these proposals.'<sup>4</sup>

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1. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., pp.28f and 31-34; Called Together, op. cit., pp.25f.
  2. The Joint Board's 'dialogue', written in a popular style, did begin the reservationist case with the side issue of 'prelacy'. But having so begun, apparently as a cue for the reply which clearly described the true nature of the proposed bishops-in-presbytery, the exchange concentrated on the original points of contention between proponent and reservationist. Rather than introduce a new argument, the intention was actually to draw the discussion away from the side issue.
  3. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., p.34.
  4. Called Together, op. cit., p.26.

And here is an important feature of the discussion. Although by any estimation the Commission's recommendations must have been seen as potentially divisive, splitting even the ranks of the pro-unionists, the difference of opinion over the matter does not seem to have been the cause of a serious rift in the uniting churches. Rather, the impression given in the published evidence - and we would remember that this impression was primarily intended for the original readers and not for ourselves - was that, irrespective of the difference of opinion, God's call could be heard through the proposals and that, by frank discussion in open fellowship, a consensus could be reached as to the best way to respond to that call.

The Methodist Handbook, though leaving its readers to reach their own conclusions, indicated its perception of one aspect of this call. Having observed that the proposals concerning bishops were intended to place the rule of the church 'in the hands not of administrators but of shepherds of the flock who are true fathers in God', it went on to comment:

'This image of a bishop is not difficult for Methodists to accept. It is the image of a Superintendent, another word to translate the Greek episcopos meaning 'overseer'. In Australia we have perhaps tended to be congregational in order, rather than episcopal. We have tended further to leave the exercise of oversight in the hands of the administrators to the great impoverishment of the rule of the pastor in the Church. What is being proposed here is a recovery of something indigenous to Methodism.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, *op. cit.*, p.29. Cf. G. Yule, 'Bishops in the Church - Three Views; (ii) The Proposed Basis of Union', Issue, Sydney, 1965, Vol.2, Winter, 1965, p.19.

Though the Handbook was somewhat equivocal in its response to the idea of bishops in the Uniting Church, it recognised that the proposals included an important and necessary emphasis on the 'recovery' of the pastoral dimension of church government. The Presbyterian Commentary too recognised this element in the recommendation, but in identifying it there was some doubt implied as to whether it might be best provided for through the office of bishop:

'The office as here envisaged is primarily evangelical and pastoral and appears to conform in few details to the usually accepted idea of a bishop.'<sup>1</sup>

That there was a place for a personal and pastoral oversight of the life and work of the church was not generally disputed. But that this function would be best fulfilled by bishops, and that the Uniting Church should from its inception be served by bishops, remained moot points.

J. F. Peter, reiterating an argument which he had put forward in a different context in 1958, saw the ministry of the bishop-in-presbytery as making for the enrichment of the church's life:

'Not only would there be a greater assurance than there is at present of meetings of the Presbytery being conducted efficiently, and of sound and mutually consistent suggestions coming from the chair, but there would be, between the meetings and over a period of years, a greater degree of planning by an acknowledged and generally trusted leader; there would be someone to whom any difficulties within parishes might be naturally taken, and whose guidance might enable matters to be quietly straightened out before they reach the

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1. Towards Understanding, op. cit., p.15.



stage of being past mending; there would be someone to whom any minister could turn for advice and not feel, as many do at present, that in the absence of anyone to whom he should go as a matter of course, he would rather not go to anyone at all; the visitation of Charges by Presbyteries would be under the guidance of a man continually in touch with their activities; the burden of extra-parochial duties (such as interim moderatorships) would be lifted from many ministers' shoulders; the bishop would be free, as no ordinary minister is, to devote time and energy to church extension; and, finally, there would be less tendency than there is at present to call upon the Moderator of the Assembly to perform a host of functions which are not part of the duties of his office.'<sup>1</sup>

Other commentators, however, wondered whether provision for such service actually required the adoption of a new office within the one order of ministry. Was it really necessary that people called to perform these functions had to be 'consecrated' rather than simply inducted?<sup>2</sup> Did these functions require that the one to fulfil them be set apart for this service for life?<sup>3</sup> Would a bishop really be better able to exercise such a ministry than a presbyter would be if set apart by the presbytery to accept similar responsibilities?<sup>4</sup> Did the call of God to a 'recovery' of the personal and pastoral dimensions of church government really demand the adoption of the office of bishop?

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1. J. F. Peter, Church Union In Australia, op. cit., pp.35f; cf. J. F. Peter, 'The Bishop-in-Presbytery : An Australian Reaction', Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol.XI, 1958, pp.375-388.
  2. I. Gillman, Grappling With The Proposed Basis Of Union, op. cit., p.11.
  3. A. H. Wood, The Proposed Basis Of Union Explained For Methodists, op. cit., p.11.
  4. Towards Understanding, op. cit., p.16.

All of these questions, though usually left unanswered by those who raised them, being put with such frequency and from so many sides, in fact became rhetorical. Although there was a sincere appreciation of the need for the kind of oversight which could be provided by bishops, there was a deep uncertainty as to whether the adoption of the episcopal office itself was the most appropriate response to this need. Though prelacy, hierarchy and clericalism were universally rejected, it was felt that it was unnecessary and unwise to court such dangers, and that some other way should be found to respond to God's call.

This did not mean that there was a rejection of episcopacy in principle, nor even that the style of episcopacy envisaged in the Proposed Basis was unacceptable.<sup>1</sup> It did mean, however, that an acceptance of episcopacy in practice, even along the lines proposed, could not be made a precondition of union in view of the equivocal response which the proposals received. If the immediate union was to be accomplished, common sense precluded a forcing of the issue; especially since the door had not been closed on the possibility of a reconsideration of the matter within the Uniting Church. Thus, in the event, one of the original contentions of the reservationists had been upheld.

But the significance of bishops for the Uniting Church in itself had been only one aspect of the proposals. The Commission had placed great emphasis on the wider implications of the uniting churches adopting an episcopal 'system', particularly in so far as it was

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1. Cf. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., p.28, where one of the Methodist signatories of the Reservation took pains to make this clear.

proposed that this be achieved with the help of the Church of South India. Taken together, the acceptance of bishops and the entry into a Concordat with the CSI, were intended to express a commitment both to the continuing movement towards church unity and to mission in unity with the church of God in that part of the world. Though the symbolic aspects of the proposals were important, they were not intended to be simply a 'grand gesture', but a real, if tentative, step towards the fuller realization of 'mission in unity'. They were intended not only to represent, but also to be in themselves a breaching of ecclesiastical, national and racial walls of division.

The wider implications of the proposals were not lost on the readers of the Proposed Basis. J. F. Peter, in his commentary, pointed out that the situation which constituted the major obstacle not just to inter-communion but even to Christian co-operation was 'the inability of some to recognize as valid the ministry exercised by some others'.<sup>1</sup> He further argued that the foundation of this obstacle was the division between 'those who have, and those who do not have, a ministry episcopally ordained'.<sup>2</sup> He therefore suggested that:

'In this situation it seems futile to hope for progress in bridging the gulf while we stand on opposite sides of it hurling our arguments at each other. To do 'all in our power' to remove this obstacle appears as a clamant duty, and the Joint Commission believes that the proposed Concordat with the Church of South India is the way in which we in Australia at the present time are being called upon to perform that duty.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. J. F. Peter, Church Union in Australia, op. cit., p.37.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., pp.37f.

Later in his booklet, he replied to the reservationists' concern that these proposals would cause a delay in the present process of union, and their opinion that there would be time enough after union for the Uniting Church to deal with the matter of episcopacy as the question of their relationship to, for example, the Anglican church became a more immediate issue. Peter argued that:

'To be concerned about a possible delay to the union is natural - and shared by all members of the Commission, though the majority would no doubt argue that delay is not too great a price to pay for getting it more nearly right at the outset. But it is doubtful whether what is proposed will cause the sort of delay which the minority fear. For every church member hindered by 'uncertainty and concern' there may be two, or even ten, spurred to enthusiasm by proposals which call for more than a minimal disruption of accustomed practices and open the way to a union of a wider kind.'<sup>1</sup>

And certainly, while there were those who were worried by the proposals, there were also those who offered their enthusiastic assent. But the tendency for spirited debate between the two sides to turn to vitriolic dispute went some way to counter Peter's suggestion that the enthusiasm of the 'two, or even ten' could compensate for the hesitancy of the 'minority'. The Methodist Handbook showed concern over this problem:

'It is much regretted that some have said that, unless episcopacy and the concordat are included in the scheme of union, they will withdraw from the proposed union altogether. It is equally regrettable if others say they will withdraw because these two elements are advocated. (Perhaps in both instances we should say 'feel inclined to withdraw', or for sweet charity's sake think that is what is meant.)'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.45.

2. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., p.34. The parenthesis was an editorial interjection to the statement being made by a signatory to the Reservation.

Even as this more domestic eirenical consideration suggested counsel against its pursuit on the wider front envisaged in the proposals, serious doubts were expressed as to whether what the Commission proposed would in fact achieve the aims set for it. J. H. Gowdie, though initially tending to accept the reservationists' point of view, came to the conclusion that:

'Humanly speaking it seems unlikely that there can be any progress towards union with any episcopalian Churches until we 'take episcopacy into our system'. But unless we set out bishops at the time of our union any proposal to do so, even within thirty years of our coming together, would almost certainly divide the united Church.'<sup>1</sup>

He also saw an advantage in being able to set forth 'a full and unambiguous statement' of the Uniting Church's convictions concerning church government and ministry, including its understanding of the nature and function of bishops, before any formal negotiations with an episcopally ordered church were initiated.<sup>2</sup> But even though he found what he considered to be good grounds for the acceptance of a form of episcopacy for the Uniting Church, he could not agree that the Concordat and the participation of the Church of South India in the consecration of the Australian bishops would in any way enlarge the potentiality for closer relations with the Anglican church as the Commission had suggested. Pointing to the ambivalent response of the Lambeth Conferences to the Church of South India, its more positive attitude towards the schemes of union for Ceylon and for North India and Pakistan, and to the arrangements suggested for 'Services of Reconciliation' in the Conversations

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1. J. H. Gowdie, op. cit., p.19.

2. Ibid., p.20.

between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain, Gowdie argued that as far as the Anglican church was concerned full recognition could only be given to churches 'whose bishops are within the 'apostolic succession' as they conceive it, and whose ministers are episcopally ordained':<sup>1</sup>

'In view of these facts it would seem that those members of the Joint Commission are deluding themselves who imagine that our adoption of arrangements on the South Indian pattern and acceptance of South Indian consecration would facilitate Anglican recognition of the ministry of our united Church.'<sup>2</sup>

He added that the early indications were that an involvement of the Church of South India with the Uniting Church in Australia along the lines proposed could potentially compound the difficulties already experienced by the CSI in its relationship with the Anglican communion.<sup>3</sup>

Though the proposals concerning bishops and the Concordat were obviously related, supporters of the scheme argued that each could conceivably stand alone; that there would be value in the retention of the proposed office of bishop even if the Concordat was dropped, and equally

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1. Ibid., p.19.
  2. Ibid. Cf. A. H. Wood, The Proposed Basis Of Union Explained For Methodists, op. cit., p.12; The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., p.33.
  3. Ibid. This remains a moot point. Bruce Upham, an observer of the negotiations and a member of the later Commission, agrees with Gowdie's assessment, adding that an agreement with the CSI along the lines of the 1963 proposals would have imposed a particular view of ministry on that church which had been avoided in the 1947 union. Cf. B. Sundkler, Church of South India : The Movement Towards Union 1900-1947, Lutterworth Press, London, 1954, pp.144-153 (esp. re the proposal that a bishop of the Mar Thoma Church or the Church of Sweden participate in the consecration of CSI bishops, pp.145f). But Colin Williams maintains that in his contacts with the CSI at that time he found an enthusiastic reception for the proposed Concordat, especially in that it was being seen as a way of re-opening the question of the relationship between the CSI and the Anglican communion. He added that informal discussions had already taken place concerning an agreement between the CSI and the UCA on the training of ministers.

there would be value in proceeding with the Concordat even if the Church of South India could not participate in the consecration of the Australian bishops.<sup>1</sup> The Proposed Basis had stressed the significance of the Concordat in itself by its placement at the beginning of the text and quite separate from the section dealing with ministry and bishops.

It was impossible for the Commission to spell out precisely what form the Concordat might take, not only since they were dealing with a concept which was new to themselves and for which there was no precedent, but also because the details of such an arrangement would have to be worked out in formal negotiations with the Church of South India.<sup>2</sup> But having indicated their hope that the Concordat would serve as 'an expression of oneness with her (the CSI) in the life and mission of the Church', as a sign of 'a desire to manifest more fully the unity of the Church across national, cultural and racial boundaries', and as a witness to the world 'of Christ's offer, through the Church, of the gift of His reconciling love', the Commission offered a broad description of the sort of arrangement envisaged:

'This Concordat, which is more than the co-operation of separate churches in particular activities and less than a merger of two churches, is that form of unity appropriate to churches existing in separate countries : a covenantal relationship between two churches with different constitutions, yet one in mission, with agreement in faith and order and a membership and ministry mutually recognised and interchangeable.'<sup>3</sup>

Given that the Commission, in preparing this proposal, had to compensate for the fact that it was conditional upon the uniting churches'

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1. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., pp.33f.
  2. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union in Australia', op. cit., p.50.
  3. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.77.

authorization of an official approach to the Church of South India, upon a favourable response to that approach, and upon the details of the instrument only then being able to be worked out, this statement was about as comprehensive as one could have expected. But considering the uneasy response to the relatively more precise proposals concerning, for example, deacons, it is not surprising that the reaction in the uniting churches was not altogether positive. George Yule, a tireless advocate of the Proposed Basis, unhesitatingly confessed:

'We are going forward to no little extent in the dark. This is a cry for help to the Church of South India and one of the ways they could help would be in teaching us the way this pastoral bishop-in-presbytery should function.'<sup>1</sup>

For Yule, such an admission did not weaken the case supporting the Concordat since in the situation of the uniting churches, where there was perceived to be a need for the restoration of the personal and pastoral dimension of trans-congregational oversight, a 'cry for help' was the most reasonable course of action. The uniting churches, it was argued, possessed no organ or office suitable to the newly recognised function of oversight, but the Church of South India, with its reformed bishops, did. The sensible thing to do, therefore, was to turn to the CSI for assistance. But for as much as a proponent of the Concordat could say:

'It means that the church in Australia is saying 'we are in need of renewal. Come and help us. Together we will seek the meaning of renewal in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ'.<sup>2</sup>

this attitude invited the rejoinder:

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1. G. Yule, 'Bishops in the Church - Three Views : (ii) The Proposed Basis of Union', op. cit., p.19.
  2. Called Together, op. cit., p.26.



'The Concordat makes it sound as if our own churches lack something essential. It raises too many problems and is not essential to the basic proposals for union.'<sup>1</sup>

But it would be too hasty to conclude that the negative attitude towards the Concordat originated in a misguided sense of ecclesiastical self-sufficiency, or to speculate upon a nationalistic or, worse, a racist motivation underlying the response. The evidence suggests that the basis for the unenthusiastic reception of the Concordat lay elsewhere, and may be summarized in four points.

First, if the 'wider recognition' which it was said would attend the involvement of the Church of South India in the consecration of Australian bishops was to be as limited and ambiguous as many commentators held, then the Concordat seemed to add little but complication to the scheme of union. Second, since the uniting churches were already both in principle and practice 'united in mission' with the Church of South India, pledged to 'stay together' with it in the WCC, and participant with it and other churches in that part of the world in the EACC, then the Concordat was surely an unnecessary exercise.<sup>2</sup> Third, in the minds of many readers of the Proposed Basis, the proposals concerning bishops and the Concordat were inseparably linked.<sup>3</sup> If bishops were to be dropped from the scheme, even if only to be taken up for reconsideration at a later date, then the Concordat should go also. And fourth, with all the other 'unknowns' which would inevitably

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1. Ibid.

2. Cf. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., pp.31f; and The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.68.

3. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., p.33.

accompany the abandonment of the three separate churches and the formation of a new church, an additional 'shot in the dark' was not readily welcomed. This was suggested by the fact that the Concordat was celebrated as an important proposal in its own right only in an 'academic' setting, by such as Davis McCaughey, George Yule and Colin Williams,<sup>1</sup> and when such advocacy was forced through 'dialogue' with the reservationists.<sup>2</sup> Other commentators either settled for a non-committal repetition of the supporting argument,<sup>3</sup> or refrained from making any comment at all.<sup>4</sup>

Though rejecting none of the aspirations embodied in the proposed Concordat, there was a body of opinion in the uniting churches which could not accept that section of the Proposed Basis.<sup>5</sup> Aside from the frequent expression of doubt concerning the realism of the goals set for the Concordat, the 'catch 22' in the proposal remained : without more detailed information on the arrangement many readers were unwilling to offer their endorsement, but without this endorsement there could be no official approach to the Church of South India to work

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1. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, 'Church Union In Australia', op. cit., pp.50f; G. Yule, 'Bishops in the Church - Three Views : (ii) The Proposed Basis of Union', op. cit., pp.18f; and C. W. Williams, The Church, op. cit., pp.164 and 182.
  2. Cf. The Methodist Handbook On Church Union, op. cit., pp.31-34; and Called Together, op. cit., pp.25f.
  3. Cf. Towards Understanding, op. cit., p.10.
  4. Cf. I. Gillman, Grappling With The Proposed Basis Of Union, op. cit., p.3.
  5. It is impossible to judge the proportion of the uniting churches' membership which formed this body of opinion. But even if it was only a minority, the presence of this 'uncertainty and concern', which had been predicted in the Reservation, mitigated against the pursuit of the Concordat as a pre-condition of union.

out the details of the instrument. Thus, both through the contest of debate, and also in no small measure by default, the remaining contentions of the reservationists were upheld. Not only the matter of bishops, but also that of entering a special relationship with another church would have to be postponed if progress towards the immediate union was not to be impeded.

Chapter Four

The Revision of the Proposed

Basis of Union

## Section One

### The 'ecclesiastical climate'

- (i) Introduction
- (ii) 'God-talk' and Church Union
- (iii) Crisis in Ministry
- (iv) 'Imagination and the Future'

(i) Introduction

The amendments made to the Proposed Basis of Union, which was published in its new form in 1970, cannot be wholly explained by the evidence in the preceding chapter. Certainly the response of the uniting churches to their proposals was the basic resource of the Commission as it entered the next stage of its work, but it was not their only consideration. The 'ecclesiastical climate' was also to be admitted as relevant to their deliberations. Of course their earlier work had taken account of this, and they had striven to fashion an instrument suitable to the church in Australia at that time. But, at the risk of stating the obvious, the ecclesiastical climate in the early sixties was to change significantly by the end of the decade. The seeds of change were already there when the Commission began its work at the end of the fifties, but with each succeeding year there was an acceleration in its growth so that it became quite inappropriate to treat the revision of the Proposed Basis as a 'scissors-and-paste' exercise. In particular, the deepening of the crisis of traditional belief and the alarming increase in the incidence of conflict between ministers and their congregations and of dissatisfaction and disenchantment within the church was something which could not be ignored by any with an interest in the future of the church and its mission.

Introducing his important sociological study of Australian clergy, based on survey data gathered at the end of the sixties, Norman Blaikie offered a description of the ecclesiastical climate within which ministers were attempting to pursue their vocation:

'It was an era in which basic doctrines such as the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection and Life after Death, all of which had been the subject of radical interpretation in academic circles for some time, became

issues of public debate. It was an era of heresy trials - Bishop Pike in the United States, and closer to home, Professor Geering in New Zealand. It was an era in which some clergy were not only speaking out on social issues but were also becoming involved in political protest. It was an era of declining church membership, attendance and financial contribution - of local churches becoming economically precarious. And, finally, it was an era in which there was an unprecedented 'drop out' of clergy.<sup>1</sup>

Before discussing the revision of the Proposed Basis of Union, therefore, it is necessary that we refer to certain studies of religion in Australia in the late sixties, in an attempt to gauge the ecclesiastical climate within which the Joint Commission sought to assimilate the responses of the uniting churches to their earlier proposals. It will be necessary also to identify the kind of theological response to this context which was being represented on the Commission. In this regard, articles by Davis McCaughey, one of the most influential of the commissioners, will prove to be helpful.

While the proposals of 1970 were certainly continuous with those of 1963, they represented important developments in the thinking of the Commission which can only be adequately understood in the light of developments which emerged as the mercurial sixties ran their course.

(ii) 'God-talk' and Church Union

In 1966 a major survey of 'Religion in Australia' was initiated by the Department of Sociology in the Institute of Advanced Studies of the

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1. N. W. H. Blaikie, The Flight of the Australian Clergy - To Convert, Care or Challenge?, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1979, p.11. Blaikie expanded upon this description in his first chapter, 'Religion in the Sixties', pp.11-19.

Australian National University, under the direction of Hans Mol.

Although the final report on the survey was not published until 1971,<sup>1</sup> by the end of the sixties some early results were becoming available. In 1969 Mol presented some findings and offered some analysis of the survey data concerning ecumenical attitudes.<sup>2</sup>

To the question, 'Would you like to see your own denomination (if you belong to one) merge, or join together with any other denomination?', 64% of respondents said they would, while 21% indicated that they would not.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, regularity or irregularity of church attendance seemed not to affect whether a person was likely to be for or against mergers.<sup>4</sup> On further investigation of the responses it became clear that neither did other types of religious life, such as prayer habits or beliefs, correlate with attitudes to union. Although there was a strong association between the 'orthodoxy' of religious beliefs and whether the respondent cared about the question of union, 'whether one was for or against these mergers had little to do with these beliefs as such'.<sup>5</sup> Mol confessed that these findings were 'rather unexpected', and saw that they raised the question, 'If the Australians who want their churches to merge do not differ on the religious factors from those who are against any and all mergers, in what ways then do they differ?'<sup>6</sup>

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1. Hans Mol, Religion in Australia, Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd., Melbourne et al., 1971.
  2. J. J. Mol, 'The Merger Attempts of the Australian Churches', The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XXI, January 1969, pp.23-31.
  3. Ibid., p.25.
  4. Ibid., pp.25f.
  5. Ibid., p.26.
  6. Ibid., p.27.



The survey was not designed to test all the possible causes and effects of ecumenical attitudes, but at certain points those for and against mergers did differ significantly. Mol tentatively identified these as 'pointers to likely sources of differentiation for future investigation'. For example, those who opposed church union were more likely to be those who condoned different treatment according to the importance of a person, those for whom 'getting ahead' was a kind of 'personal adage', and those who agreed that 'the most important thing for a child to learn is to obey rather than think for himself'.<sup>1</sup> The person who approved of mergers was likely to be more egalitarian and less authoritarian. These differences, though interesting in themselves, were very striking when compared with the way in which religious belief and practice seemed to have no bearing on ecumenical attitudes.

Bryan Wilson, in an earlier and more speculative study of religion, in Britain, had argued that:

'In an age when Christianity has been demythologized, when traditional ideas about God have been radically challenged by bishops of the Church, ecumenism becomes a new faith - something to believe in. There has been something like a mass conversion of the clergy. It is not a spirit which has suddenly overtaken the Churches, it is a campaign which has been actively, almost aggressively, canvassed.'<sup>2</sup>

For Wilson there was no need to look further than the secularity of society, the decline in the membership and influence of the churches,

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1. Ibid., pp.27f; cf. Hans Mol, Religion in Australia, op. cit., p.135, Table 20.1.

2. B. Wilson, Religion In Secular Society - A Sociological Comment, C. A. Watts and Co. Ltd., London, 1966, p.125.

and the disruption of traditional religious beliefs to account for the interest of churchmen in ecumenism. Similarly, Mol had begun to identify non-religious factors as being determinative of ecumenical attitudes among Australians:

'... favouring or disfavouring mergers and unions of denominations seems to have nothing to do with theology or even religion. And this seems to be the major surprise of the survey ... the people's attitude towards mergers of Australian denominations has precious little to do with religion in general and religious belief in particular. This being so, the implications for ecclesiastical strategy are that theological arguments about the nature of the Church (and maybe the ministry) are likely to be a waste of time if one hopes to change the grass-roots attitudes to church union thereby.'<sup>1</sup>

But even if Mol's inferences were correct and theological argument had been shown to be of limited tactical value in 'selling' the cause of union, at least one event in the second half of the decade strongly suggested that the advocacy of a particular scheme of union would require careful attention to 'God-talk'.

In 1966, the publication of an article on the Resurrection by Professor Lloyd Geering, the principal of the Presbyterian Theological College in New Zealand, in the official journal of the New Zealand Presbyterian church provoked an unprecedented readership response.<sup>2</sup> It is this reaction, rather than the article itself which is of present interest.<sup>3</sup> The letters to the editor included a wide range of reactions

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1. J. J. Mol, 'The Merger Attempts Of The Australian Churches', op. cit., pp.30f.
  2. Our account of the Geering 'heresy trial' is based on that given in N. W. H. Blaikie, op. cit., pp.14-17. Cf. B. Colless and P. Donovan (eds.), Religion in New Zealand Society, T. and T. Clark Ltd., Edinburgh, 1980, pp.26 and 72.
  3. For an example of Geering's theological views, cf. L. Geering, God in the New World, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1968, and Resurrection - A Symbol of Hope, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1971.

from a few expressions of complete agreement and several letters welcoming the exchange of ideas, to responses of alarm at the potentially detrimental effect that Geering's views might have on the faith of older church members and theological students. Geering was invited to write a series of articles elaborating his views and responding to criticisms:

'But that was not the end of the matter. So great was the impact of the debate that theology became a newsworthy item in the media.'<sup>1</sup>

The controversy reached such proportions that, at the 1967 Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, Professor Geering was called to the Bar of the House to be charged with 'grave doctrinal error'. Although it was decided that 'no doctrinal error has been established, the charges are dismissed, and the case is closed', and although a committee was appointed to prepare a pastoral letter to all congregations, the repercussions of the Geering 'heresy trial' continued to be felt not only in New Zealand, but also in neighbouring Australia. Not only did the Australian press, both secular and religious, take up the story, offer editorial comment and receive readership responses, but the controversy also had its effect on Australian congregations. A Presbyterian congregation in Sydney was split when its minister and the majority of its members resigned, forming the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Sutherland, in reaction to the acquittal of Geering by the New Zealand Assembly. Though this was certainly an extreme response, Norman Blaikie reported that 'conversations with clergy during this period indicated that the theological climate was causing them concern,

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1. N. W. H. Blaikie, op. cit., p.15.

particularly its impact on parishoners'.<sup>1</sup> Even two years after the trial, the invitation of Geering to a Brisbane Presbyterian congregation rekindled the controversy not only within that congregation but also in the church at large.

The Geering 'heresy trial' significantly contributed to the situation in the sixties in which the crisis of traditional belief, or at least traditional expressions of belief, became an issue of great importance and the subject of earnest discussion at all levels of Australian church life. Whether it was the challenge to tradition or the challenge to belief which was the cause of anxiety is an interesting question, but secondary to our present purposes. Our interest is on the bearing which this had on the kind of work which the Joint Commission had to undertake.

The uniting churches were being presented with a scheme of union which involved not only a certain amount of organizational upheaval, but also a restatement of their convictions concerning the faith, the church and the ministry - a theological 'overhaul'. Given the kind of anxiety, over the challenge to traditional belief, which was brought to light, and perhaps in part caused, by the Geering 'heresy trial', the Commission was obliged to tread carefully as it addressed the problem of the revision and amendment of the Basis of Union. Traditional practice would inevitably be disrupted to some extent by the union of three separate denominations, and although this was not generally an unwelcome prospect, it could not be separated from the 'disruption', in some sense of the word, of the traditional expressions of belief which had maintained the churches in separation. This was now a delicate matter indeed.

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1. Ibid., p.17.

(iii) Crisis in Ministry

In 1966 Kenneth Dempsey, from the Department of Sociology of La Trobe University, began a study of the relationship between a succession of ministers and the laity of the Methodist congregation in a New South Wales country town. His interest had been aroused when, as a newcomer to 'Barool', he found that the frequent, and often public, conflict between ministers and lay people in the congregation had caused the Methodists to become 'something of a joke in the community'.<sup>1</sup> In his study he sought to uncover the dynamics of the relationship between ministers and laity which had in recent years made the Barool Methodist church an arena of conflict.

In 1973 Dempsey published a paper in which he offered a preliminary analysis of certain of his findings.<sup>2</sup> Reiterating what had become a truism, he began with the assertion that, 'Most of the problems confronting the professional ministry are manifestations of secularisation'.<sup>3</sup> Following Wilson,<sup>4</sup> he defined secularisation as 'the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance'. Dempsey found it possible to categorize ministers according to 'the strategies they advance to meet the difficulties created for them by secularisation'.<sup>5</sup> He suggested two broad headings for this

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1. K. Dempsey, Conflict and Decline - Ministers and laymen in an Australian country town, Methuen Australia, Melbourne et al., 1983, p.180.
  2. K. Dempsey, 'Secularisation and the Protestant Parish Minister', Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology, Vol. 19, No.3, October 1973, pp.46-50.
  3. Ibid., p.46.
  4. B. Wilson, op. cit., p.xiv.
  5. K. Dempsey, 'Secularisation and the Protestant Parish Minister', op. cit., p.47.

categorization : 'Conservative and Individualistic Strategies', and 'Reformist and Radical Strategies'.

In the former he placed those ministers who confronted the problem of secularisation by a more rigorous application of 'an approach that worked well for approximately the first sixty years of this century',<sup>1</sup> through the employment of the existing machinery of the congregation, namely, its clubs, associations and familiar activities; or by innovation directed towards the recovery of the social significance of the religious institution, for example, the introduction of various counselling or training programmes for the laity. This involved the direction of energies towards activities within the congregation itself, towards existing members, and towards outsiders only in so far as it was hoped thereby to bring them within the life of the congregation.

Among the ministers placed in the latter category were those who confronted the problem of secularisation by endeavouring, through their parish ministry, 'to generate a collective and humanitarian response on the part of laymen to a variety of social and political issues and problems'.<sup>2</sup> This involved the turning of interest towards the wider community, seeing the religious institution as a basis for activity but not as its object.

According to the strategies of the former category, therefore, we might say that the laity are 'passive' with respect to ministry; that is, they are primarily recipients of the service which is rendered by the ordained minister. Certainly the worship, associations and clubs

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.48.

of the congregation rely on the willingness of the laity to commit time, energy and money to sustain these activities, but even so, the laity remain the principal beneficiaries of their perpetuation. According to the strategies of the latter category, however, we might say that the laity are expected to be 'active' with respect to ministry; that is, they are primarily agents of the service which is rendered by the church to the community. The strategy still involves that the laity be served by the minister, but it is a service directed towards their mobilization for mission in the wider community.

Dempsey's findings in 'Barool' indicated that conflict between ministers and laity arose when ministers adopted the latter strategies, which involved the kind of lay involvement which we have inferred. Norman Blaikie's detailed survey of Australian Protestant clergy, conducted in 1969 and 1970, confirmed that Dempsey's 'Barool' was not an isolated circumstance, but fitted in well with the overall Australian situation. Blaikie identified nine styles of ministry which he was able to discuss under the general headings of 'conservative' and 'radical':<sup>1</sup>

'Clergy who adopt a 'conservative' style of ministry prefer the rescue ship view of 'the Church', tend to focus their ministry on the lost sheep and are likely to hold an anti-secular position. In contrast, clergy who adopt a 'radical' style of ministry prefer the leaven in the lump view of 'the Church', tend to focus their ministry on the community or the world, and are likely to hold a pro-secular position.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. N. W. H. Blaikie, op. cit., pp.147-149.

2. Ibid., p.155.

Blaikie found that ministers who adopted one of the 'radical' styles of ministry were more likely to indicate that their goals for 'the Church' were not shared by their congregation or parish members,<sup>1</sup> and were more likely to describe their attitude to ministry as 'frustrated' or 'negative'.<sup>2</sup>

Dempsey and Blaikie each found that the minister whose goals for the church are outwith the congregation or institution itself is most likely to encounter conflict with the laity and frustration in his own work.

Dempsey made a further observation of some significance. In 'Barool' he found that the history of the Methodist congregation could be divided into two periods : 1905 to 1949, the 'years of harmony', and 1950 to 1967, the 'years of conflict'.<sup>3</sup> He found that in the first period ministers adopted predominantly 'conservative' strategies, and that in the second period ministers adopted predominantly 'radical' or 'reformist' strategies.<sup>4</sup> He argued that this was not coincidental but represented a development in the nature and exercise of ordained ministry in the Australian Methodist church in general. In the second half of the twentieth century ministers received more tertiary education, as the church sought to enhance the status of ministry. At the same time, however, there was a decline in the social status of the minister concomitant with the loss of social significance by the church.

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1. Ibid., p.178, Table 60.

2. Ibid., p.185, Table 62.

3. K. Dempsey, Conflict and Decline, op. cit., p.8 and pp.11-13.

4. Cf. ibid., p.118; and K. Dempsey, 'Secularisation and the Protestant Parish Minister', op. cit., p.48.



Countering this, and partly as a result of the increased educational requirements for ministry, ministers began to emphasise 'professional expertise and professional autonomy' and to see the laity as 'clients' rather than as 'colleagues'. And finally, ministers in the second period had a greater measure of financial security than their fore-runners, both in the parish setting, since the Connexion by then had undertaken to guarantee their stipends, and in a broader sense, since their improved educational qualifications fitted them for alternative professional occupations if the demands of parish ministry became too great or too unreasonable.<sup>1</sup>

It seemed that in fact there was a trend by which congregations were encountering a 'new breed' of minister, who was likely to employ the very strategies that made for conflict with the laity. Blaikie found that it was indeed the case that the younger and the better educated clergy were those most likely to adopt a 'radical' style of ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Barely a decade later, reporting on the survey which he conducted on Protestant beliefs and attitudes in South Australia, John Bodycomb found that:

'If we can say that our study shows church people were a deviant group in Australian society, it is also true to say that clergy might be considered a deviant group within the church! ... they were more likely to report some kind of spiritual experience : for them the 'journey inward' was apt to have more reality than for the laity ... they were more likely to adopt a (relatively)

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1. K. Dempsey, Conflict and Decline, op. cit., pp.126-131.
  2. N. W. H. Blaikie, op. cit., pp.154f.

liberal position on many matters of personal behaviour, e.g. abortion, homosexuality, marijuana, prostitution, suicide, violence under certain circumstances, World Council of Churches help to national liberation movements, women's liberation, and the youth sub-culture ... As a group, they were more to the 'left' politically than the laity. On some issues they were less 'liberal' than the laity, e.g. on multinational corporations, the mining of uranium - and also the standards for church membership! In short, they were a deviant group within the larger group."<sup>1</sup>

A gulf had developed between the aspirations of the clergy and the expectations of the laity. This divide was perceived to have developed well before the sociologists began to map it.<sup>2</sup>

In 1965 an anonymous Presbyterian minister, having been asked to comment on the Montreal Report on Section III, 'The Redemptive Work of Christ and the Ministry of His Church',<sup>3</sup> took the opportunity to put the frustrations of an Australian country minister before an international audience.<sup>4</sup> His comments underscore the findings of the sociological studies which we have been discussing as being a personal reality.

The Report spoke of how Christ 'stirs up, calls, strengthens and sends' the ones whom he has chosen for special ministry.<sup>5</sup> But the country minister, though testifying to this experience 'mediated to me

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1. J. Bodycomb, The Naked Churchman - A Protestant Profile, The Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, 1978, pp.133-135.
  2. Cf. K. Dempsey, Conflict and Decline, op. cit., p.172.
  3. The Fourth Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., pp.61-69.
  4. Risk, 'The Ordained Ministry', Vol. 1, No.2, Second Quarter, 1965, ' - from Australia', pp.25-30.
  5. The Fourth Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., p.64.

by those who have influenced me most in the fellowship of the Church',  
added that:

'... having been inducted into the parish, I found myself isolated not only from the congregation I serve and the community in which I live, but also by distance and time from those whose fellowship I have valued in the past.'<sup>1</sup>

The Report spoke of the church as being called to announce 'by word and deed' the gospel.<sup>2</sup> But the country minister observed that:

'... the Church has relegated this task to one member, the minister.'<sup>3</sup>

The Report spoke of the minister as guarding the unity of the church, the sign of Christ's Kingdom in the world and evidence that 'the devil is conquered and that God reigns'.<sup>4</sup> But the country minister reported that:

'... in a country parish of three preaching places there is little of unity. The resulting disunity means that the ministry of the congregation is to itself, and its main concern is for its mere survival, doing what grand-father did. In this situation the minister is thought to be on the side opposed to the person making the judgement, and the minister finds himself isolated from all the splinters in the congregation.'<sup>5</sup>

The Report spoke of the minister as being responsible for 'the equipment of the other members in the work of ministry that they may carry

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1. Risk, op. cit., p.25.

2. The Fourth Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., p.64.

3. Risk, op. cit., p.26.

4. The Fourth Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., p.64.

5. Risk, op. cit., p.26.

out the responsibility committed to them in baptism'.<sup>1</sup> But the country minister pointed out that in his experience:

'... no matter how willing the minister may be to equip his people for their service, their main concern is that the religious club continues. He may work himself to death doing what he thinks is necessary and also what the congregation expects ... In my own situation preparing to equip my people depends upon my gaining insights and training outside the parish, and this entails travelling and time away. The leaders of the parish often look upon this as a misuse of time and a dereliction of duty.'<sup>2</sup>

These comments did not amount to a cynical rejection of the ideals of the Montreal Report, a smug 'word from the wise'. Nor even did they represent an appeal for more realism, less 'ivory tower' thinking. But they were an expression of the frustration of one who affirmed:

'I believe the Church should be on the frontier in every situation, whether it be industrial, urban, or rural, and that it needs to marshal all its resources of men and abilities so that it may in fact serve the world.'<sup>3</sup>

The editor of that issue of 'Risk', A. H. van den Heuvel, in his Forward, 'The Frustrations of the Ordained Layman', drew together the strands of thought expressed in the articles from Africa, Germany, Australia, South America, and the United States, concluding:

'I commend this issue to the reader, underlining what John Mbiti says : the ministry certainly does not present the Church with its most excruciating problem. It only points to a much

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1. The Fourth Conference on Faith and Order, op. cit., p.67.

2. Risk, op. cit., pp.26f.

3. Ibid., pp.29f.

deeper one : an authentic Church in which all members (of the laos = laymen), ordained or not, perform their part of the messianic ministry.<sup>1</sup>

We have earlier discussed the way in which the Reports and Proposed Basis of Union presented by the Joint Commission were consonant with the kind of ecclesiological thought which was finding expression in the wider ecumenical movement. The matter of priority was obedience to the missionary call of Christ, which was understood to demand the engagement of the church in the world in service. This was further perceived to involve an obligation which was incumbent not only on the ordained ministry, but on the whole church and its every member. We saw too that the uniting churches seemed quite receptive to the idea that the Uniting Church be shaped by Christ's call to mission : that the demands of mission in Australia in the second half of the twentieth century be determinative of ecclesiastical structures.

Admittedly, there was an almost complete silence on what was thought of the implications of this missionary emphasis for the laity. It may be that the interest aroused by the proposals for ordained ministry was such as to detract from a serious consideration of what was demanded of the 'man in the pew'. Indeed, the sociological studies which we have been discussing showed that it was likely that attempts to mobilize the laity for 'their part of the messianic ministry' would encounter strong resistance - the experiences of the country minister were not uncommon, and in fact represented what was emerging as the norm.

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1. Ibid., p.8.

The Proposed Basis had included a 'reformist' stance with respect to ordained ministry to the extent that it had seen this ministry as being ultimately directed towards goals for the church which were outwith the institution and congregation. Although the Commission had not wished to 'gloss over' this potentially conflictual stance, the oblique expression given to this view in the Proposed Basis proved too vague to register against the assumptions which were being challenged. If this had been seen as an important issue when the Proposed Basis was being framed, it was beginning to reach proportions of crisis by the time the task of amending and revising the Basis was to hand. By the end of the sixties it had become imperative that the mission of the church be unequivocally affirmed as charging ordained and lay members, alike and together, with responsibility for ministry.

(iv) 'Imagination and the Future'

In previous chapters we have referred to the contribution made by Davis McCaughey to the work of the Joint Commission. By the nature of the case it is impossible to provide an inventory of his specific input. A hallmark of ecumenical work is its anonymity and the willingness of ecumenical theologians to refrain from putting their name to products of their own genius. And this is necessarily so. As Ernst Lange has observed of the working departments of the WCC:

'Consultation is the chief method in ecumenical work, ecumenical activity. Individual achievements, inspirations, ideas and plans are all of them important but it is only through consultation that they acquire ecumenical status and influence. They have to pass through the filter of an interconfessional, international, intercultural, interdisciplinary consultative process.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. E. Lange, And Yet It Moves, op. cit., p.124.

This also applies to ecumenical work undertaken on a regional level, such as that of the Joint Commission in Australia. Although a study of the language and theological perspective of the Commission's Reports, particularly the First Report, the Proposed Basis of 1970 and the Revised Basis of 1971, strongly suggests the hand of Davis McCaughey, they were nonetheless the fruit of a consultative process and evidence of McCaughey's contribution must remain largely anecdotal.<sup>1</sup> But in seeking to describe the Commission's approach to the amendment and revision of the Proposed Basis, certain articles by Davis McCaughey prove to be a valuable resource.

In 1956, in an article entitled 'Language About The Church',<sup>2</sup> McCaughey produced an argument in which we can identify some of the concerns which he brought to the work of the Commission in the following decade and a half. On that occasion his interest was in New Testament language about the church, and he investigated five central images of the church. The subject of his study was the New Testament writers' use of imaginative language about the church, that is, language which 'works on the imagination'. His enquiry was not so much concerned with what the images 'mean' as with what these images 'do' to the life of the church.<sup>3</sup> He did not attempt to draw propositional abstractions from the images, but was concerned with the way concrete imaginative

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1. In Imagination and the Future - Essays on Christian Thought and Practise, Presented to J. Davis McCaughey, ed. John A. Henley, The Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1980, there are two such anecdotal references to his contributions to the Commission (George Yule, p.94) and the 'New Delhi Statement' (Lukas Vischer, p.155).
  2. The Reformed Theological Review, Vol. XV, No.1, February 1956, pp.1-17.
  3. Ibid., p.4.

language was able to express the experience of being in the church and evoke a certain consciousness and affective awareness in the church.

In his concluding remarks, McCaughey identified two consequences of such an appreciation of New Testament language about the church. First, he suggested that confessional and theological language inevitably moves away from the 'concrete imaginative language' of the New Testament towards 'more generalized formulation'. He observed that the structure of the church tended to be derived and controlled by these 'general statements'. He argued that:

'A way must be found whereby the Word, and that means the Biblical words - or at least the dominant Biblical images, the scriptural words which have revelatory power - can be released into the life of the Church. A Church which lives by the Word of God must be content to be shaped and reshaped by these images.'<sup>1</sup>

Further, with an awareness of the kind of work being done not only in ecumenical initiatives but also in the theological and liturgical revisory enterprises within certain denominations, he proposed that:

'The supplementing of traditional confessional and denominational statements, and the revision of liturgical practise, all of which is called for no longer by 'the modern mind' but by a recovery of Biblical awareness, will require to have as its preoccupation the release of the central Biblical images into the life of the Church.'<sup>2</sup>

Second, McCaughey found that it was necessary to challenge two 'misleading intellectual habits'. The first of these was 'the assumption that imaginative language is inexact and childish', as opposed to

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1. Ibid., p.15.

2. Ibid., p.16.



general statements which were supposed to evidence intellectual precision and maturity. He argued that the choice between metaphorical and ontological interpretations of New Testament images of the church was too narrow, and that a third approach might be found to compensate for the inadequacy of this distinction.<sup>1</sup> Extrapolating on this supposition, the second habit which he challenged was 'the exclusive attachment of many in the Western Christian tradition to the via negativa', which he described as the 'way of rejection of every intermediate image to reach God Himself'.<sup>2</sup> He acknowledged that the rationale behind this was to pre-emptively exclude 'pre-occupation with everything else' in order to truly worship God. But he suggested that:

'... there is another way, the Way of Affirmation, 'the approach to God through these images' : the recognition of God's presence in the repetition of God-given, Biblically-enshrined, imaginative language about Himself and His Church. There is a constant danger that theologians having climbed to God by means of His self-revelation in scripture ... kick away the ladder by which we have ascended. ... it is only as we live in the image-affirming life of the Church as Israel, qualified by the Biblical language, that we shall achieve our true existence as the household of faith, the people of God.'<sup>3</sup>

McCaughey's 'concern for the much neglected discussion of imagination in theology'<sup>4</sup> found scope for expression as his talents were channelled into negotiations for church union in Australia, and particularly

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.17.

4. Norman Young, in Imagination and the Future, op. cit., p.55.

the formulation of a Basis of Union. In 1967, in an article entitled 'Confession of Faith in Union Negotiations',<sup>1</sup> his interest in the function of language, and the 'imaginative' function of language in particular, was in evidence. The second section of his paper was devoted to a consideration of what 'a Confession relevant to our day' would be like. He described the kind of Confession which churches might make at the point of union as accomplishing three things.

First, it would 'point unequivocally behind' all verbal formulations, including Scripture, to Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> The adverb seems misplaced here at first, but McCaughey was convinced that any such theological construction should unambiguously acknowledge its limitations in relation to its subject - one who can not be apprehended by words, but only in faith and obedience. We might say he was calling for a form of statement the cogency of which would be comprehended in more of an 'imaginative' or 'existential' than an intellectual way. So he saw a need to emphasise the 'Christian message' where 'doctrine' had hitherto held pride of place. He suggested that:

'A recovery of awareness of the greatness of the Christian Faith will ... certainly include a recovery of it as preached message - one might almost say, preached presence.

... we should be less concerned - in our bases of union - to define what the faith is than we are to describe where it is to be found. We should be less concerned with how orthodoxy is to be preserved and more concerned with how the springs of faith and obedience are to be renewed ... less preoccupied with the great Confessions as systematic statements of the faith and of their consistency one with

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1. Mid-Stream, Vol. VI, No.3, 1967, pp.23-46.

2. Ibid., p.31.

another, more concerned that in the life of the Church men come to confess Jesus Christ and Him crucified.<sup>1</sup>

Calling for a sensible acknowledgement of the limitations of theological language, but also for a recognition of its mediatory possibilities, he proposed that although:

'... ours is unlikely to be the generation (if any is) which will articulate the faith again in its fulness ... What we can hope to do in common is to point men to the means and places of renewal of faith, and supremely through it all to Him who is the ground and means of faith, its author and finisher.'<sup>2</sup>

Second, McCaughey suggested that a Confession 'relevant to our day' would be less concerned with the propositional definition of 'what exactly the Christian Faith is' than with directing the church to the places 'where faith is to be found'.<sup>3</sup> Here would be an affirmation of the priority of scripture. But this would not require a new statement on Biblical authority, rather, churches should go into union:

'... with a common commitment to the Bible as containing the texts from which the Church preaches. It is from this that faith comes alive.'<sup>4</sup>

Adopting a consciously Barthian view of scripture, he maintained that the Bible becomes the Word of God when it is preached, and that the point of union is a time to repent of the church's infidelity whereby 'Christian ministers have been too busy to prepare sermons, or find

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1. Ibid., p.33.

2. Ibid., pp.33f.

3. Ibid., pp.31f.

4. Ibid., p.36.

other ways of conveying a message derived from Holy Scripture'.<sup>1</sup>

McCaughey emphasised that first and foremost it was preaching that was properly controlled by the Bible. He observed that the Bible does not always deal directly with the moral issues, nor even some of the theological issues, which face the modern church:

'But what Scripture can do, let it do well :  
mediate the presence of God in Jesus Christ  
into the lives of men, so that He becomes  
their living Lord and Saviour.'<sup>2</sup>

He went further, arguing that preaching must be controlled by the Bible in all its 'diversity and variety'. He considered that it would be better for a United Church to commit its ministers to preach from a lectionary than to impose upon them 'some straitjacket view of Scriptural authority'.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, McCaughey argued that, in its treatment of the sacraments, a Confession which might be made at the point of union would serve the renewal of faith and life in the church better if it worried less about the provision of a 'quasi-philosophical and theological definition' of the sacraments, and concerned itself more with their use.<sup>4</sup> His concern was less with what the sacraments 'are', and more with what the sacraments 'do'; 'the significance of the sacraments for faith'.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.37.

2. Ibid., pp.37f.

3. Ibid., p.38.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p.39.

Creed and Confession must also be affirmed as places 'where faith is to be found'. But McCaughey challenged the propensity of the church to employ them as 'tests of orthodoxy'.<sup>1</sup> The church must take seriously the historical grounding of such statements of faith; that they belong to certain historical occasions and are not possessed of an absolute, literal authority. Recognising this, he argued, the church had to deal directly with it:

'Such an acknowledgement cannot be left to the mental reservations of ordinands : it must be built into the doctrinal basis of the Church.'<sup>2</sup>

Third, McCaughey made plain what had already been implied in his paper, that a Confession suitably made at the point of union:

'... will quite implicitly state its awareness of its own limitations, confessing the faith and committing to the future the correction of that confession, first at the hand of the Spirit in the life of the Church and finally in that great judgement to which all things tend.'<sup>3</sup>

This was not to counsel resignation before the rising tide of 'loss-of-nerve theology',<sup>4</sup> by which the church might retreat from traditional Christian affirmation, then in a time of crisis. The 'queen of the sciences' might have seen her minions rise to become regents in her stead, but the kind of 'implicit' acknowledgement of the limitations of a Confession which McCaughey advocated was not proposed that the

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1. Ibid., p.41.

2. Ibid., p.43.

3. Ibid., p.32.

4. Ibid., p.37.

church might secede from the realm of modern thought, but that it might accede to its proper station on the interface between history and the Word. For the church to be so engaged would require from the outset that it be open to the possibility that, in its on-going life of worship, witness and service, it will need to reinterpret or reframe old words and find new words as the Spirit leads, and open to the certainty that in the end 'to which all things tend' perfection will be granted but only through correction. At a time when those who sought to articulate the faith could be charged with heresy on the right and obscurantism on the left, McCaughey called for a vital optimism since 'the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his Word'.<sup>1</sup>

In a later article<sup>2</sup> McCaughey called for a renaissance of theology in Australia, or more precisely for the churches to encourage and cultivate the nascent Australian theology:

'Australia has not yet produced its Christian intellectuals who are the equivalent of Nolan in painting, of Patrick White in literature, of Burnet in medical science, never to mention its well-known figures in the field of sport ... Anti-intellectualism is a besetting sin in official Australian church life. The churches could find themselves the last outpost of Australian philistinism, and that in the name of the common man.'<sup>3</sup>

Both as a churchman and a professional theologian, he was concerned that serious theological endeavour be encouraged if the church in

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1. The Australian Hymnbook, Collins, Sydney, 1977, p.421.
  2. 'Current Theology : Australia', Religion In Life, Summer 1968, pp.191-196.
  3. Ibid., p.196.

Australia were not to become an inert, nescient clique within society. It amounted to a missionary imperative at a time when Australia was beginning to find a distinctive voice in many other fields, raising not only the consciousness but also the expectations of the community.

It needs to be reiterated that McCaughey was not alone responsible for the revision of the Proposed Basis of Union; he worked in consultation with a body of commissioners. And again, we must acknowledge that in spite of the evidence, both anecdotal and to be inferred from the Reports, we are not justified here in attributing the revisions of 1970, exclusively or predominantly, to the hand of McCaughey. But with these qualifications, we can say that the viewpoints and concerns expressed in his independent writings were precisely of the kind which informed the work of the Commission at the end of the sixties.

McCaughey was certainly not alone in approaching the ecumenical theological task with this perspective. According to Ernst Lange, there was emerging among Faith and Order theologians the conviction that their task:

'... is not just to make people more contemporary, more up-to-date, in their ways of thinking about the Christian faith but also to reorient their religious life and their consciousness towards the future ... The strange must cease to be strange to them. Change is to be welcomed instead of feared or condemned. God must be transplanted out of the past and become known and welcomed as the One who has always already moved ahead into the future. The Church must cease to be only the familiar past and become instead the longed-for future.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. E. Lange, op. cit., p.75.

Though matters looked somewhat bleak on the ecclesiastical front in Australia at the end of the sixties it was not a time to 'drop anchor' before the gathering storm; to place all confidence in a reactionary adherence to doctrinal formulations and ecclesiastical structures and practices of the past. Nor was it a time to acquiesce to the buffeting and battering that it would deliver; to resort to a 'loss-of-nerve' theology in seeking to assimilate the church to the modern world and 'modern mind'. But it was a time to 'raise a sail', and with optimism and vigour to ride the storm, assured that through all the vicissitudes of history the church, renewed in faith and obedience, would go forward on its missionary voyage. A Basis of Union would fulfil its mandate not just in providing the means for a merger of denominations, but also in its promise to serve the on-going needs of a church in via.



## Section Two

### The Basis of Union

- (i) 'Open to the future'
- (ii) Summoned to renewal in faith and mission
  - (a) The given message
  - (b) The places of renewal - the scriptures and sacraments
  - (c) Fathers, Reformers and Scholars
- (iii) Members and ministers
  - (a) Members are ministers
  - (b) Ministers and ministers of the Word
  - (c) Ministers are members
- (iv) Government and Law, 'on the way to the promised end'

(i) 'Open to the future'

According to Frank Hambly, the Chairman of the Joint Commission, it was in the November of 1968 that the Commission reached agreement on all the matters which were before it with respect to the revision of their earlier proposals, and unanimously accepted a new draft Basis of Union. Some minor amendments were made in the following year with the result that the document was completed on Christmas Eve, 1969.<sup>1</sup> The Proposed Basis was published in 1970, and a second edition, incorporating certain amendments requested by the 1970 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, was published in 1971.<sup>2</sup> Certain of Hambly's comments in his Preface to the Proposed Basis of 1970 were quite significant:

'The process of review in response to suggestions which came from all levels of the churches' life has been a creative work. Proposed amendments have combined with a renewed emphasis on the themes of word and faith, and the resultant Basis brings together the doctrinal affirmations and principles of order and structure which will give shape to the Uniting Church ... We acknowledge that any basis must have its limitations, not only because of the fallibility of those who frame it, but also because God has yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word.'<sup>3</sup>

The responses received by the Commission to their earlier proposals did not in themselves necessitate that the process of review be a

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1. See the 'Preface' to The Proposed Basis of Union, The Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1970, p.5.
  2. See the 'Preface to the 1971 Edition', The Basis of Union, The Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1971, pp.6-8.
  3. The Proposed Basis of Union (1970), op. cit., p.5.

'creative work'. For example the resolutions of the General Conference of the Methodist Church, in 1966, concerning the Proposed Basis were couched in terms of suggested deletions from and insertions to the existing document. Only with respect to Deacons and The Council of the Congregation did it request a general redrafting of the relevant sections of the Proposed Basis.<sup>1</sup> Such suggestions, which were typical of the general response of the uniting churches, required only that the Commission make suitable modifications to the document of 1963; a responsible task certainly, but not necessarily a 'creative' one. But the combination of this with 'a renewed emphasis on the themes of word and faith' - an emphasis which we might understand as being (at least) consonant with the views of Davis McCaughey which were discussed above - convinced the Commission that an overall revision of the Proposed Basis was required. Although this decision did not take the Commission beyond its mandate precisely, it had certainly not been made mandatory that they engage in such an undertaking. It was their decision to take account of the response of the uniting churches to their earlier proposals, and also of the emerging theological response to the ecclesiastical climate of the sixties. Here was a responsibly-creative approach to the task of revision.

In his pamphlet, Introducing the Basis of Union, Norman Young answered the question, 'How does it differ from the Proposed Basis of 1964?'<sup>2</sup>

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1. See Minutes of the 21st General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia, 1966, pp.153-156.
  2. The Second Report was completed in November 1962, and the Proposed Basis was before the Methodist General Conference in May 1963. Some sources, such as the one being cited, date it at 1964, but this is a publishing date.

'It takes into account the comments made on the earlier Basis ... The present Basis is more concise,<sup>1</sup> and as well as including proposed amendments has given a renewed emphasis to the centrality of grace and faith. It is more open to the future than was the previous Basis, and seeks to give the Uniting Church freedom to meet changing circumstances in ways that will enable her to continue her primary task of proclaiming the Gospel.'<sup>2</sup>

'Openness to the future' was by no means an emphasis which was absent from the earlier Basis, and it had found explicit expression in the Commission's Reports. Similarly, the church's 'freedom to meet changing circumstances' had already been affirmed as important for mission. But while these themes had been elements of the earlier Basis, they became hallmarks of the new Basis.

The tone of the new Basis was set in its opening paragraphs. The first paragraph, which described the decision of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches to unite, essentially reproduced the corresponding paragraph of the earlier Basis. But in the few changes made to the wording the new emphases were already being indicated. For example, whereas the earlier statement had described the uniting churches as 'seeking that unity which is both Christ's gift and His will for His Church',<sup>3</sup> this was amended to read that they were 'seeking to bear witness to that unity ...'<sup>4</sup> Both documents acknowledged God's blessing of the churches in their separation, and also

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1. The Presbyterian General Assembly in particular had suggested that the 1963 Basis was too long and that its revision should include an attempt to provide a more concise statement.
  2. N. Young, Introducing the Basis of Union, Published for the Joint Commission on Church Union, by the Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, 1971, p.11.
  3. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.77.
  4. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.9.

that none of them had made a fully obedient response to God's love. But again, whereas the original document went on to pray 'that God will grant to them a time of recovery in which God will use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all mankind',<sup>1</sup> the statement of this movement in the 'gospel rhythm' was amended to read 'they look for a continuing renewal ...'<sup>2</sup> in which God would use their common life.

In such subtle changes in phraseology the Commission signalled a more dynamic approach to union; an approach which saw union as less of a goal, the summit to be reached after years of negotiation, and more of a jumping-off point. More than 'seeking that unity' which was Christ's gift and demand, they were 'seeking to bear witness to that unity'. More than petitioning for 'a time of recovery', they were looking for 'a continuing renewal'.

The second paragraph of the Proposed Basis had dealt with the Concordat with the Church of South India. Given the response of the uniting churches it was necessary that this proposal be omitted. But rather than simply delete the offending paragraph, the Commission revised that section so as to develop the concerns which were embodied in the proposed Concordat. Here, therefore, was the acknowledgement that 'the Uniting Church lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church'.<sup>3</sup> There was a recalling of the Ecumenical Councils of the early church, and the expression of the hope for 'a time when the faith will be further elucidated, and

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.77.

2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.9.

3. Ibid.

the Church's unity expressed, in similar Councils'.<sup>1</sup> There was thanksgiving for membership in the WCC and other ecumenical and international bodies, and a commitment to 'maintain such membership'. And there was a statement that:

'She believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end she commits herself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific. She declares her desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches.'<sup>2</sup>

Although it might be somewhat disappointing that the Concordat, being a concrete expression of the ecumenical and missionary commitment of the Uniting Church, was dropped from the scheme of union, the amended paragraph did make it possible that such a move be given fresh consideration at a later date. But far from being simply a 'rear-guard' action, the revision actually enlarged the potentiality for the involvement of the Uniting Church with neighbouring churches. The restated commitment would be honoured, not just in a single arrangement, but only in a continuing reaching-out to offer and receive help and fellowship through whatever 'special relationships' it might be possible to develop in the course of time with Asian and Pacific churches.

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1. Ibid. Cf. The Uppsala Report, 1968, op. cit., p.17 : 'The members of the World Council of Churches, committed to each other, should work for the time when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians, and lead the way into the future.' For an indication of the way the discussion of this theme began to develop see The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XXII, No.2, April 1970, L. Vischer, 'A Genuinely Universal Council ...?', pp.97-106; C. Parthenios-Aris, 'I. Reactions to 'A Genuinely Universal Council'', pp.107f; and R. Mehl, 'II. Reactions to 'A Genuinely Universal Council'', pp.109-112.
  2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.10.

And within Australia itself, the Uniting Church would be one which would work together with, and even seek union with, the other churches. Although the Basis could not define the manner in which the commitment to mission in unity would be expressed, as it might have done if it had been possible to proceed with the Concordat, it sought instead to affirm an openness to whatever that commitment might entail as the church moved into the future.

In its opening paragraphs the Basis expressed a readiness to embrace the future in continuing obedience to Christ's missionary call. As one commentary saw it:

'The Church is essentially a people commissioned to proclaim the Gospel. Here at the beginning of the Basis - and again throughout the 18 paragraphs - the Uniting Church is confronted with the call to mission.'<sup>1</sup>

And although it was initially the uniting churches which were committed in the Basis 'to hear anew the commission of the Risen Lord to make disciples of all nations', it was intimated from the outset that it was the Uniting Church, and its succeeding generations, which was being confronted with the call to 'look for a continuing renewal', to 'remain open to constant reform under His Word', to 'seek a wider unity', and 'daily to seek to obey his will'.<sup>2</sup>

The development in the following paragraphs of these emphases of openness to the future and on-going obedience to the call to mission did not represent a departure from the earlier Basis. But they were

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1. I. Gillman and D. Wood, Towards An Informed Decision on The Basis of Union, prepared for the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, Ambassador Press, Granville, 1971, p.13.
  2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.9.

given a more emphatic and compelling expression in the revised document. One of the study booklets issued by the Joint Board put the matter succinctly:

'Our preparing for union while helping us to appreciate our past should emphasise a vision of how by God's grace we can go forward together into the future. This must not be an exercise in survival but a time for excitement about the future.'<sup>1</sup>

(ii) Summoned to renewal in faith and mission

(a) The given message

From its third paragraph, the new Basis departed, sequentially though not conceptually, from its predecessor. The earlier Basis, with the opening sentence, 'The Uniting Church acknowledges with joy that she belongs to the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and would confess the fullness of the catholic faith',<sup>2</sup> proceeded immediately to an account of the doctrinal standards of the Uniting Church. In the new Basis the matter of doctrine was integrated into a series of paragraphs which, more than anything, constituted a summons to renewal in faith and mission; a series opening with the sentence, 'The Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>3</sup>

The paragraph then went on to identify this One on whom the faith and unity of the church is built. But rather than offer a doctrinal

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1. D. Marks and D. Merritt, Forward Together - Ways and Means to Prepare for the Uniting Church in Australia, The Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, 1975, p.4.
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.77.
  3. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.10.



definition, the Christological statement was framed in the form of a retelling of the message of Christ's life, death and resurrection, concluding with the appeal:

'To God in Christ men are called to respond in faith. To this end God has sent forth his Spirit that men may trust him as their Father, and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. The whole work of man's salvation is effected by the sovereign grace of God alone.'<sup>1</sup>

There was little comfort for those of a more scholastic bent here. Even the trinitarian framework of the message amounted less to a reiteration of the ancient doctrine than to an evangelical confession of the God who makes himself known, and is known by Christians, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The message having been enunciated, albeit in a necessarily abbreviated form, the paragraph went on to describe the church's

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1. Ibid. The last sentence was inserted at the request of the Presbyterian General Assembly of 1970. The Commission saw the sentence as 'summarizing what might be said to be the 'basis of The Basis', (ibid., p.6).
  2. It should be observed at this point that a new theological perspective was in evidence in the revised Basis. At a very basic level it could be described as the introduction of a Bultmanian perspective where Barthian views had earlier been dominant. At the risk of oversimplification, the emphasis had shifted from the givenness of the revelation of God in Christ, to the givenness of the message that God was in Christ. Even more pronounced was the adoption of an approach consonant with that of Ernst Käsemann, a student and sympathetic adversary of Bultmann. In this respect, see the author's 'Introduction' to, R. Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, translated by Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1958, pp.3-15; and Käsemann's essays, 'Is the Gospel Objective?', in E. Käsemann, Essays on New Testament Themes, translated by W. J. Montague, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1964, pp.48-62, and 'Blind Alleys in the 'Jesus of History' Controversy', in E. Käsemann, New Testament Questions of Today, translated by W. J. Montague, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1969, pp.23-65.

response to the proclamation:

'God in Christ has given to men in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end : to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself ... she is a pilgrim people, on the way towards a promised goal; here she does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds her with Word and Sacraments, and she has the gift of the Spirit in order that she may not lose the way.'<sup>1</sup>

It is entirely characteristic of the Basis that, not satisfied with a simple 'I believe in the Church', nor with an amplification of this article in traditionally philosophical terms, it sought to describe the church in a theological statement, not primarily of what it is in relation to God, but of what it does in its relationship with God. For the sake of the 'reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation', the church itself is to be a 'fellowship of reconciliation',<sup>2</sup> a body in which each one's gifts are employed for the sake of the whole, and which is an instrument in the hands of Christ, for the sake of whose mission it exists. And if this description of what being the church is like were not enough, its dynamic character was underscored by the affirmation of the itinerancy and provisionality of the church which is in movement from the event which it proclaims to the fulfilment of that event's promise.

Still postponing the direct treatment of doctrinal standards, the fourth paragraph was concerned with the 'feeding' to which allusion was

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1. Ibid., pp.10f.

2. Cf. The Uppsala Report, 1968, op. cit., 'The Quest for the Unity of Mankind', pp.17f.

made in the last sentence of the preceding paragraph. It committed the Uniting Church to an acknowledgement 'that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because her Lord comes, addresses, and deals with men in and through the news of his completed work'.<sup>1</sup> Such an acknowledgement called the Uniting Church to put aside any assumption of institutional potency, and with due humility to recognise that not by means of any dogmatic, constitutional or structural mechanism which it might devise, but only because of 'Christ who is present when he is preached'<sup>2</sup> does the church manage to meet and survive the vicissitudes of circumstance. Such an acknowledgement called too for a sense of optimism; a confidence ultimately and properly based on an affirmation of the grace by which the church is created, sustained and equipped for its life and mission:

'Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command men's attention and awaken their faith; he calls them into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way he constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.'<sup>3</sup>

(b) The places of renewal - the Scriptures and Sacraments

It was only in the fifth paragraph that attention was focussed on the primary standard of doctrine. The message of Christ, to which the church responds, and through the proclamation of which Christ 'in his own strange way' makes and moulds the church, is derived from the scriptures. 'When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, her message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses.'<sup>4</sup> But rather than attempt to

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1. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.11.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

define scriptural authority, the Basis sought to describe the way in which scripture's 'control' is, and is made, active. First, it acknowledged receipt of the Old and New Testaments which it recognised to be 'unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which she hears the Word of God and by which her faith and obedience are nourished and regulated'.<sup>1</sup> Second, committing the Uniting Church to the realisation of what it has received in the scriptures and to listen to their testimony, the Basis required that:

'The Uniting Church lays upon her members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures, commits her ministers to preach from these and to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures.'<sup>2</sup>

Although this was no definition of scriptural authority, it was surely its measure. Such is the authority of the scriptures that members are bound to read them, and ministers to preach from them and administer the sacraments as 'effective signs' of their message. The authority of the scriptures will be proven in and by their use.

The following three paragraphs were significant as much for their location as for their formulation. Rather than going on from the scriptures to treat the secondary literary standards of doctrine, as the earlier Basis had done,<sup>3</sup> the new Basis turned its attention to the sacraments. Baptism was affirmed as the act by which Christ 'initiates men into his life and mission in the world'.<sup>4</sup> The Lord's Supper was

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.77f.

4. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.12.

affirmed as the way in which 'Christ signifies and seals his continuing presence with his people ... feeds his baptized people on their way to the final inheritance of the Kingdom', and strengthens them 'for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world'.<sup>1</sup> Thus those who in baptism are 'united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of one Spirit', through Holy Communion 'grow together into Christ'<sup>2</sup> as his missionary people.

Though the interpolation of the treatment of the sacraments between the statement concerning the scriptures and those concerning the creeds and confessions certainly reflected the Reformers' insistence that the sacraments be held together with the preaching of the Word, the effect was to do more than preserve this characteristic Reformed perspective. As the emphasis on the scriptures had been that they be used - that they be read and their message preached - so too the emphasis on the sacraments was that they be celebrated - that the Gospel be enacted and proclaimed in the sacraments, and that the people be initiated into Christ's mission and nourished for their participation in that mission. It was not what they 'are', but what they 'do' which was of primary concern. Or better, what they 'are' was affirmed in terms of what they 'do' - in terms of their functional significance for the missionary church. The paragraphs concerning the scriptures and the sacraments properly belonged together since it is in their use especially (and especially in their use) that Christ 'comes, addresses, and deals with men ... reaches out to command men's attention and awaken their faith ... constitutes, rules and renews them as his

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

Church'. The matter of doctrinal standards, of questions such as scriptural authority and the nature of the sacraments, was being thoroughly integrated into a summons to renewal in faith and mission.

(c) Fathers, Reformers and Scholars

But lest the scriptures and the sacraments be put to some idiosyncratic or sectarian use,<sup>1</sup> and the Uniting Church isolate itself from the catholic and apostolic church, the Basis went on in paragraphs nine and ten to place the Uniting Church in continuity with the past by affirming an allegiance to the church which has expressed the faith in Creed and Confession. In paragraph nine it was stated that the Uniting Church 'enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by her use of the confessions known as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed'.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand there was the acknowledgement of the receipt of these as 'authoritative statements of the Catholic Faith ... to declare and to guard the right understanding of that faith'. On the other hand this was qualified by describing them as being 'framed in the language of their day and used by Christians in many days'.<sup>3</sup> Again, strong emphasis was placed on 'use'. So there was the declaration that the Uniting Church:

'... commits her ministers and instructors to careful study of these creeds and to the discipline of interpreting their teaching in a later age. She commends to ministers and congregations

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1. A use, we might add, already excluded in the Basis by its affirmation of their uniting function (paras. 4, 7 and 8), and indeed by the expressed determination to work and grow together with the wider church (paras. 1 and 2).
  2. Op. cit., p.12. The Chalcedonian Decree was deleted from the revised scheme due to the lack of enthusiasm in the uniting churches for this novel expression of catholicity.
  3. Ibid.

their use for instruction in the faith, and their use in worship as acts of allegiance to the Holy Trinity.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the Creeds were received as 'authoritative statements', but with an authority which could not be abstracted from either the historical occasion of their formulation or their use in later generations.

This perspective was brought to bear on the Uniting Church's confessional heritage, in paragraph ten. In a typically careful formulation it was affirmed that:

'The Uniting Church continues to learn of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, and in the power of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, from the witness of the reformation fathers ... In like manner she will listen to the preaching of John Wesley ...'<sup>2</sup>

As the Uniting Church sought to hear and respond to the message of the scriptures, it would be instructed by the witness of the Scots Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Savoy Declaration, and Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons. What it heard and the way it would respond was not predetermined by these instructors, but, being informed by their witness, the church must determine this for itself in its own generation with faithful 'obedience and freedom' and with the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Again the authority of these Confessions was acknowledged in an undertaking to make use of them:

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1. Ibid., pp.12f.

2. Ibid., p.13.

'She will commit her ministers and instructors to study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture.'<sup>1</sup>

Creedal and confessional formulations were being received, but not as a kind of 'map' which anticipated in abstract terms the geography of the church's journey of faith. They were received more as a kind of 'compass', pointing always to the message of the scriptures and to God in his Trinity : the 'north' from which the church must take its bearings as it traverses the uncharted terrain of the future.

Finally, in paragraph eleven, the Basis included an explicit acknowledgement of a tradition which, by reason of its novelty, had hitherto been afforded an authority which was de facto in any technical sense. It was affirmed that the Uniting Church:

'... enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and thanks God for the knowledge of his ways with men which are open to an informed faith.'<sup>2</sup>

The introduction of the tradition of modern scholarship to a statement concerning doctrinal standards was certainly well overdue. The understanding and enunciation of the faith had long been informed by scholarly and academic activity. The sixties had seen a popularisation of the results of theological and biblical studies; even if largely through the kind of furore which accompanied the writings of, for example, J. A. T. Robinson or Lloyd Geering. They no longer belonged

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1. Ibid. Cf. George Yule's comments on this attempt to bring the creeds and confessions 'out of a museum and to use them effectively in the Uniting Church', in A. I. C. Heron (ed.), The Westminster Confession in the Church Today, The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1982, pp.102f.
  2. Ibid.



to the 'secret life' of ordinands, but, for better or for worse, were being fed into the living tradition of the church. Similarly, the methods and findings of the social and human sciences were being included among the resources of theologians and ecclesiastics; as can be seen, for example, in the 'Missionary Structure of the Congregation' study, or in the commissioning of sociological studies by church bodies.<sup>1</sup> It was important, therefore, that this matter was placed before the uniting churches in the Basis.

But more importantly, the Basis did not simply recognise these new and undeniably authoritative voices in discussions related to doctrine. It provided a theological framework by which the church could conscientiously attend to their instruction. The Basis emphasised that the scholarly tradition was to be understood in the context of grace. So the paragraph opened with the acknowledgement that:

'... God has never left his Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, his living Word.'<sup>2</sup>

And further, the ecclesial and theological significance of human investigation and intellectual enterprise was highlighted with the affirmation that:

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1. Cf. J. Bodycomb, The Naked Churchman, *op. cit.*, which was sponsored by the Joint Advisory Council of South Australia (Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and Churches of Christ); or E. H. R. Dowdy and G. M. Lupton, The Survey of Declining Recruitment to the Ministry : Final Report, A.C.C., Sydney, 1973 (typescript), which was sponsored by the Australian Council of Churches.
  2. The Basis of Union, *op. cit.*, p.13.

'She lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which she will learn to sharpen her understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought.'<sup>1</sup>

And finally, understanding the scholarly tradition as properly to be seen within the inventory of the many gifts which God bestows on the church and, as such, as demanding exercise within the missionary church, the paragraph concluded with the litany:

'She thanks God for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr. She prays that she may be ready when occasion demands to confess her Lord in fresh words and deeds.'<sup>2</sup>

With the luxury of being able to look back dispassionately on the anxious moments which were passed before the birth of the Uniting Church, we can observe that in several instances it was the critics of the new Basis who drew attention to matters of central importance in the document which was shortly to be the subject of voting. Of course their primary intention was to expose the 'evil' of the proposed scheme of union, or at least its wrongheadedness, and frequently their enthusiasm in this endeavour led to a distortion and misrepresentation of the Basis. But it is interesting how often a critic's attack would be directed towards a 'real enemy' which was fielded in the Basis, and which could not be dismissed as an imagining. Graham Lake, for example, attacked the Basis for its 'functional approach to doctrine' by which it sought 'to show how it would operate in practice, rather than attempting a definition of the faith'.<sup>3</sup> Or again, the 'Presbyterian

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. G. C. Lake, Re-Form or Renew?, Seaview Press, Sandgate, 1971, p.13.

Church Association' called attention to the omission of specific matters of doctrine; omissions, it argued, which 'will be apparent when the doctrinal articles of the Basis of Union are compared with the thirty-three chapters of the Westminster Confession'. It deplored the Basis' failure to accomplish what it saw as 'one of the main functions of a confession', namely, 'the exclusion of error'.<sup>1</sup>

The critics were wholly justified in claiming that acceptance of the Basis would cost something in terms of the definitive statement of Christian doctrine. Whatever else the new Basis was, it was not the kind of prescriptive summary of belief which had traditionally served to safeguard the 'truth' and impeach the 'mistaken'. To accept the Basis would be to relinquish such defensive ramparts and the comforting illusion of strength and security they offered a beleaguered church; to step beyond the bulwarks and be exposed to an unpredictable, and perhaps unfriendly, future. The critics saw this as perverse and a patent folly. But the proponents of the scheme saw this as a necessary risk demanded not simply by strategic considerations, but by the very Gospel which the church had received and proclaimed. As Ian Gillman commented in one paper:

'... it is the hope of the Joint Commission that the Basis will have a continuing formative role to play in the life of the Uniting Church, rather than become merely a reference source as have so many definition-type statements of the past. The Basis, in the spirit of the Gospel, calls us to step out, with faith in Christ rather than in a man-made detailed contract. It has an open-ness about it as a result - but so has the call of Christ - 'Follow me!'<sup>2</sup>

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1. A Critique of the Proposed Basis of Union 1971, published by the Presbyterian Church Association, McKellar Press, Malvern, (undated, circa 1971), p.8.
  2. I. Gillman, Let Truth and Falsehood Grapple - An examination of the arguments advanced against the Basis of Union in 'Here We Stand' by Rev. Ron Clark and Rev. Samuel McCafferty, (typescript, circa 1971), p.10.

Barely adumbrative of the articles of the faith, the Basis defied those who searched it for a neat 'set of beliefs'.<sup>1</sup> The Basis was framed with a different function in view, and was well described as a 'charter under which we agree to go on mission together'.<sup>2</sup> It was better seen as a manifesto for renewal in faith and mission.

(iii) Members and ministers

(a) Members are ministers

From the twelfth paragraph the Basis began to deal with the ordering of the Uniting Church, and in paragraphs thirteen and fourteen with the ordering of ministry. But earlier paragraphs had already included affirmations of real pertinence to the understanding and ordering of ministry.

In the third paragraph the church was called to participate in Christ's ministry of reconciliation and renewal, 'the end in view for the whole creation'. The 'diverse gifts' which are to be found amongst its members are to be enlisted for the sake of this ministry. Thus, ministry is Christ's, the whole body of the church is called to participate in his ministry, and the individual members of the body have their contributions to make in this participation. Further, it was here affirmed that the ministry of Word and Sacraments is first of all Christ's, and implied that those who exercise it in his name thereby participate in Christ's 'feeding' of his 'pilgrim people'. Any static view of this ministry, any diminution of its function to merely the

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1. Cf. J. F. Boyal, 'So Slight in its Content, Extreme in Implication, Exclusive in Practice', Australian Presbyterian Life, 25th September, 1971, p.9.
  2. N. Young, Introducing the Basis of Union, op. cit., p.10.

maintenance and preservation of the church (as it has been or as it is), any diminution of its significance to simply a certifying mark of the authenticity of the church, was excluded. It is a ministry for a church 'on the way towards a promised goal', operative within a community which has no 'continuing city but seeks one to come', and its function and significance must be perceived within this dynamic context.

The significance of the proclamatory function of ministry of the Word was heavily emphasised in the fourth paragraph. Those who are called to announce the message of Christ are called to cooperate with the One they proclaim as he himself 'reaches out to command men's attention and awaken their faith', and as 'in his own strange way he constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church'. In the paragraphs which followed, the awesomeness of this responsibility is matched by the awesomeness of this grace by which Christ makes and renews the church through preaching 'controlled by the Biblical witnesses' and sacraments administered as 'effective signs' of their message. In the hands of these ministers is also placed the 'compass' of Creed and Confession for the journey ahead. They must study the instrument and convey to the people its message to guide the day's travel.

So before the matter of special ministries was directly introduced, the Basis had already affirmed the priority of the ministry of Christ and of the grace by which Christ continues to make effective his accomplished work. All other ministries depend on this and participate in it. Further, special ministries have neither function nor significance except in relation to Christ's continuing work within, and use of, the whole body of the church.

As with the earlier Basis, the articles concerning the faith of the church and those concerning the ordering of the church were bridged by a statement concerning church membership. Although there were several differences between the earlier and later statements,<sup>1</sup> both affirmed that membership of the Uniting Church is by baptism into the Holy Catholic Church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Both statements also recognised the need for baptized members to have 'confirmed to them the promises of God' and to be renewed in discipleship. But while the earlier Basis identified the 'disciplining act' of the rite of Confirmation as 'an effectual sign' to this end, the revised Basis offered the more open-ended undertaking:

'The Uniting Church will seek ways in which members may have confirmed to them the promises of God, and be led to deeper commitment to the faith and service into which they have been baptized.'<sup>3</sup>

Clearly intending these 'ways' to include something over and above the regular pastoral and disciplining ministries in the church, something 'purpose-built' and related to the sacramental worship, and clearly intending to keep the options open in this respect, the Basis continued:

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1. One of the interesting differences was that whereas the earlier Basis accepted as members of the Uniting Church 'all baptised members' of the uniting churches, the revised Basis accepted 'all who are recognised as members' of the uniting churches. For a discussion of the significance of this revision see J. D. McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1980, p.61.
  2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.80f. The Basis of Union, op. cit., pp.13f.
  3. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.14.

'To this end she commits herself to undertake, with other Christians, to explore and develop the relation of baptism to confirmation and to participation in the Holy Communion.'<sup>1</sup>

But the subject of membership was not exhausted by defining who they are, and undertaking to seek ways for the confirmation to members of the promises and obligations of their membership. In paragraph thirteen the Uniting Church was called to take seriously the function of its members and their significance within the missionary church. Here it was affirmed that 'every member ... is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant'.<sup>2</sup> And again, insisting that no one is just along-for-the-ride in the church's pilgrimage:

'She acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of his Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service : all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.'<sup>3</sup>

The Uniting Church was being called to recognise itself for what it is. As McCaughey put it, boldly paraphrasing this sentence from the Basis, the Uniting Church must see itself 'constituted by the Lord the Spirit

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1. Ibid. In 1967, at Bristol, the Faith and Order Commission initiated a study on 'Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist'. The theme of baptism had been studied between Lund and Montreal, but the new study was proposed in the hope of reaching some concrete conclusions with respect to liturgy and practice. For the Report on the progress of the study at the time of the publication of the revised Basis see Faith And Order, Louvain 1971 - Study Reports and Documents, Faith and Order Paper No.59, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1971, pp.35-53, 'Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist'.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.

as a body with many members and with as many ministries as members'.<sup>1</sup>  
 The church must acknowledge God's grace, recognise what he does, and respond accordingly. In this case the church acknowledges that its members have been apportioned gifts, and, with the understanding that 'there is no gift without its corresponding service', the response is to:

'... provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them, and ... order her life in response to his call to enter more fully into her mission.'<sup>2</sup>

Several observations might be made at this point. It is important that the significance of the function of members was not discussed simply in terms of the various abilities which individuals might have, but in terms of the gifts which God has given them. Recognition of abilities can afford to concentrate on the 'able' few. But recognition of God's gifting of his people cannot afford ignorance of even the most 'humble' gift. Further, the dignity of each in this diversity of ministries was affirmed in that they are to be seen as each having 'a part in the ministry of Christ'. Each member has the privilege, by virtue of God's gifting, of participating in the ministry of Christ; and provision for this must be made in the church. The efficient use of resources is a sound principle of management in the church, but the faithful stewardship of God's gifts is a compelling obligation. It would be foolish to neglect the former, but it would be faithless to neglect the latter.

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1. J. D. McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union, op. cit., p.67.
  2. The Basis of Union, p.14.



It is important too that the Basis called the church to make provision for the exercise of the gifts which God has given to 'men and women'. In a document which, because of the time of its formulation, uncritically perpetuated sexist terminology, the decision to use the phrase 'men and women', instead of a generic 'men' which had been employed throughout, emphasised that the Basis really meant that every gift and every person's ministry be provided for. But not only was no gift of ministry to be neglected, it could also be inferred that here was a denial that certain gifts, and their 'corresponding service', were bestowed exclusively on one sex or the other.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, it is important that the affirmations of paragraph thirteen not only called members to recognise the contributions which they are enabled to make to the life of the church, but primarily called upon those responsible for the oversight of the church to acknowledge a gifted membership and make suitable provision for the exercise of the many ministries within it. According to the terms of the Basis of Union, the Uniting Church is required to take seriously the functions of ministry for which its members are enabled, and to take seriously the significance of these ministries within the ministry and mission of Christ in which the whole church participates.

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1. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union, *op. cit.*, p.67, where he reports that this was in the minds of the commissioners. In 1966 the Methodist General Conference resolved to modify its law to provide for the admission of women to the ordained ministry. The Presbyterian church did not follow its uniting partners in this until 1974. For an important account and discussion of women's challenging of male domination of the church during the run-up to union, especially in approaches made to the Joint Constitutional Council in 1974, see M. Tulip, 'The Struggle for Change', Trinity Occasional Papers, Brisbane, Vol. III, No.1, February 1984, pp.20-39.

(b) Ministers and ministers of the Word

This strong emphasis on the ministry of the whole church - or more precisely, the ministries of the whole membership in which every member is a minister - was not meant to imply that 'anyone can do anything', but that 'everyone can do something'.<sup>1</sup> So, in paragraph fourteen, the Basis identified special ministries to which men and women would be recognised as being called : ministry of the Word, eldership, a diaconate, and lay preaching. These were each treated in separate sub-paragraphs, acknowledging their distinctive functions of ministry. But this series of sub-paragraphs was introduced in a single sentence describing the recognition of special ministries and their function:

'The Uniting Church, from inception, will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to recognise among her members men and women called of God to preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the flock, to share in government and to serve those in need.'<sup>2</sup>

That candidates for special ministries are to be located within the church's membership is, superficially, an uninteresting empirical observation - they are unlikely to be found anywhere else, after all. But in the context of the preceding paragraph the undertaking carries more weight. These gifts which are to be exercised in special ministries are to be seen as part of the longer inventory of the gifts which God has bestowed on the membership of the church; and those who exercise them participate, together with all who perform the 'corresponding service' to their gift, in the one ministry of Christ. It is worth noticing too that the preaching, liturgical, pastoral, governmental

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1. J. D. McCaughey, ibid., p.66.

2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.14.

and serving functions mentioned in this sentence did not precisely parallel the subjects of the following sub-paragraphs. At this stage particular offices were not being distinguished from each other. Just as special ministries should not be isolated from the many ministries exercised in the church, neither should they be segregated from one another. Though a certain functional differentiation was made in the sub-paragraphs, here the essential homogeneity of the special ministries was expressed.

It was in the first sub-section of paragraph fourteen, concerning ministers of the Word, that the most substantial revisions were made to the Basis of 1970. In that edition, after providing for the recognition and acceptance by the Uniting Church of all ministers in good standing in the uniting churches who would 'adhere to the Basis of Union', it was stated that:

'She prays to God that through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit he will call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word, who will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care. Such members will be called Ministers, and their setting apart will be known as Ordination.'<sup>1</sup>

The Proposed Basis of 1963 had stressed that, 'Their ministry is exercised within the corporate priesthood of the whole Church'.<sup>2</sup> Although this might be seen as reflected in the phrase 'such members will be called Ministers', it was considered by the Commission that, 'in view of what was said in paragraph 13',<sup>3</sup> it was unnecessary to stress this

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1. The Proposed Basis of Union (1970), op. cit., p.11.

2. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., p.81.

3. The Basis of Union, op. cit., 'Preface to the 1971 Edition', p.7.

point further. But in revising the 1970 Basis, the Commission was:

'... prompted by a desire to stress the faithfulness of God in maintaining a continuous witness to Christ, since the time of the apostles, calling men to this ministry so that Christ's name may be known and owned ... It was felt necessary to stress the distinctive character of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament : to the maintenance of this ministry the Uniting Church will be committed.'<sup>1</sup>

Initially this emphasis was provided in a sentence inserted before the description of the three-fold function of ministry of the Word:

'Since the Church lives by the power of the Word, she is assured that God, who has never left himself without witness to that Word, will, through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word.'<sup>2</sup>

It had already been affirmed, in paragraph four, that it is Christ who 'constitutes, rules, and renews' the church. But it was also affirmed that it is 'through human witness in word and action' that Christ, 'in his own strange way', causes and enables the church to be. 'Christ who is present when he is preached among men is the Word of God',<sup>3</sup> and it is by the power of this Word that the church lives. The action of Christ, and principally of Christ proclaimed, is constitutive of the church. Herein lies the 'distinctive character' of the ministry of the Word. Through the service of these ministers Christ constitutes the church. It is not that they are constitutive of the church, but they serve the One who is - as he does so.

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.14.

3. Ibid., p.11 (para. 4).

The Uniting Church's understanding of the nature and meaning of the continuity of the ministry of the Word was here expressed in terms of the assurance of God's continuing provision of those who will serve this constitutive work of Christ. In the statement concerning ordination, which was added to the Basis in 1971 edition, this was further developed:

'By the participation in the act of ordination of those already ordained, the Church bears witness to God's faithfulness and declares the hope by which she lives.'<sup>1</sup>

This kind of participation in the act of ordination does not itself accomplish the succession of ministers of the Word, but 'bears witness to God's faithfulness' as he shows himself once more to have 'never left himself without witness to that Word'. And again, this kind of participation in the rite of ordination does not itself accomplish the continuity of the church in apostolic succession and the maintenance of its life, but 'declares the hope by which she lives' : that God will 'call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word'.

The act of ordination therefore is not to be understood as a mechanism by which the church provides itself with that which is necessary for its life. Rather, it is understood as signifying God's continuing provision of witness to the Word - by whose power it lives. Quite properly, the commitment to 'the maintenance of this ministry', liturgically expressed in the act of ordination, arose not simply from a sense of propriety in the face of tradition, nor simply as a matter of pragmatism in the face of ecclesiastical realities, but as a response to the grace of God. Further, for as much as ordination is a sign

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1. Ibid., p.15.

which points to God's faithfulness and the hope by which the church lives, it is an effective sign. In that ordination is the means by which the church sets apart for their service men and women called and set apart by God to proclaim the message of Christ through which he causes and enables the church to be, it gives effect to that which it signifies. Being without dominical institution, and being an enacted proclamation of the message of Christ in a secondary sense at most, ordination is less than 'a sacrament'. But nonetheless it has a certain sacramental dimension in so far as it is an effective sign of grace.

In ordination, God's gifting and setting apart of an individual is not only acknowledged, but is also actively recognised and accepted by the church which prays that the Holy Spirit will equip him for that service and, with thanksgiving, sets him apart for ministry of the Word. The gifted individual is enlisted for service. Ordination gives effect to that which it signifies in placing the gift of ministry of the Word in the context of the community of the church:

'The Presbytery will ordain by prayer and the laying on of hands in the presence of a worshipping congregation. In this act of ordination the Church praises the ascended Christ for conferring gifts upon men. She recognises his call of the individual to be his minister; she prays for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to equip him for that service.'<sup>1</sup>

In paragraph fifteen (c) it was laid down that the Presbytery's function is to 'perform all the acts of oversight necessary to the life and mission of the Church in the area for which it is responsible'.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., pp.17f.

Since the exercise of ministry of the Word is to be seen as 'necessary to the life and mission of the Church', it is appropriate that the ordination of candidates for that ministry be conducted by the Presbytery as an expression of their episcopate. It is not so much a question of who has the 'power' to ordain as it is one of who has the responsibility to ordain. By virtue of its episcopal function it is the Presbytery which has the responsibility to ordain, and ipso facto the authority to ordain. Questions of 'power', in either a political or metaphysical sense, do not really apply in this analysis.

In paragraph fifteen (a) the Congregation was seen to be:

'... the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit of Christ. Its members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world.'<sup>1</sup>

There could be no closer relationship than that between the ministry of the Word and the congregation. The former serves Christ's constitution, rule and renewal of the latter. It does nothing more or less than this and so has neither function nor significance outside the relationship with the congregation. It is therefore entirely appropriate that ordination take place in the presence of a congregation at worship. Further, as 'the embodiment in one place' of the church, the congregation plays an integral part in the act of ordination; offering praise and making its petition as it recognises Christ's 'call of the individual to be his minister' and sets her apart for that service.

According to the Preface to the 1971 edition of the Basis, it was with a certain hesitancy that the Commission added the statement concerning ordination. Although the new section included important

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1. Ibid., p.17.

affirmations concerning the ministry of the Word, the Commission was aware that 'in every part of the Christian Church the understanding of ordination is being investigated afresh'.<sup>1</sup> The statement therefore concluded with the commitment:

'In company with other Christians the Uniting Church will seek for a renewed understanding of the way in which the congregation participates in ordination and of the significance of ordination in the life of the Church.'<sup>2</sup>

It was somewhat surprising that the Basis referred to ordained ministers as 'ministers of the Word'. Although this designation had currency as a shorthand expression for 'ministers of the Word and Sacraments', the colloquial abbreviation would hardly seem appropriate in such a foundation document.<sup>3</sup> The Second Report had referred to ordination as being to 'the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and to Pastoral Care', to the ordained ministry as 'ministry of the Word and Sacraments', and had proposed that such ministers be called 'presbyters'.<sup>4</sup> The Proposed Basis which was appended to that Report referred to ordained ministers as 'Ministers of the Word, Sacraments and Pastoral Care', reflecting the 'three-fold character' of the ministry of Christ, and had distinguished the functional offices of presbyter, bishop and deacon within that one

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1. Ibid., p.7. Cf. Faith and Order, Louvain 1971, op. cit., 'The Source, Focus and Function of Ordained Ministry', pp.80-84.
  2. Ibid., p.15.
  3. In the strict sense, 'minister of the Word' means 'preacher'; or perhaps, according to the Westminster Assembly, 'teacher or doctor'. Cf. 'The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government', in Confession of Faith, William Blackwood and Sons Ltd., Edinburgh, 1979, pp.173f. In his 'Ordinations - Ordnungen' (1537), Luther did describe ordained ministers as 'ministers of the Word', reflecting a strong emphasis on the function of preaching. See J. L. Ainslie, The Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches of the 16th and 17th Centuries, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1940, pp.40f. Cf. also 'The Genevan Confession', article 20, 'Ministers of the Word', in Calvin: Theological Treatises, translated and edited by J. K. S. Reid, 'The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXII', SCM Press Ltd., London, 1964, p.32, and K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. I.1, op. cit., pp.106f.
  4. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, op. cit., pp.40f.



order.<sup>1</sup> But the final Basis, while forgoing the rather exotic term 'presbyter', settled instead for the more subtly novel 'minister of the Word'.

It is inconceivable that this could have been an unconscious departure from convention, and although no explanation was provided we must assume positive intent. Harry Wardlaw has suggested that the Commission's choice of the term 'minister of the Word' was intended to emphasise that the sacraments are 'part of a single complex of liturgy in which the Word is preached from scripture, is brought into direct relation with our human concerns in prayer and is visibly presented in Baptism and the Lord's Supper'.<sup>2</sup> He further proposed that the term was a reminder that 'the pastoral function with which the minister is charged is itself to be understood in terms of bringing this same Word to bear on the changes and chances of personal life'.<sup>3</sup>

While this explanation probably goes far enough, we might offer some further comment on this distinctive usage. 'Minister of the Word and Sacraments' is primarily a functionally descriptive term : it describes how a minister serves. But the term 'minister of the Word' may be seen as being as much theologically as functionally descriptive : it describes not only how, but also who the minister serves. In the Basis of Union, 'the Word' refers principally not to the scriptures nor to preaching but to Christ who is present when the message of the scriptures is proclaimed

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1. Ibid., pp.81f.

2. H. Wardlaw, 'Ministry and the Word of God', Trinity Occasional Papers, Brisbane, Vol. II, No.2, July 1983, p.3. This argument reflects the Reformed emphasis on the inseparability of Word and Sacraments; that it is the preacher who has the authority to administer the sacraments, and that the sacraments must be accompanied by preaching. Cf. Confession of Faith, op. cit., 'The Westminster Confession of Faith' article XXVII.IV, p.41, 'The Larger Catechism' Q.169, p.102, and Calvin : Theological Treatises, op. cit., 'Necessity of Reforming the Church', pp.203 and 206f.

3. Ibid.

- in preaching and also in the administration of the sacraments 'as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures'.<sup>1</sup> So, while the term 'minister of the Word and Sacraments' has predominantly functional overtones, emphasising the distinctive function of the ordained ministry, the term 'minister of the Word', in the context of the Basis, has predominantly theological overtones, emphasising the 'distinctive character' of the ordained ministry. The former term emphasises that the ordained minister is the member of the church enlisted particularly to preach and administer the sacraments. The latter term, though not in contradiction of the former, emphasises that the ordained minister is the member of the church enlisted particularly to serve Christ the Word who causes and enables the church to be through human witness to himself. Thus, the all-important sentence from the Basis in this context:

'Since the Church lives by the power of the Word, she is assured that God, who has never left himself without witness to that Word, will, through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word.'<sup>2</sup>

While the 'distinctive character' of the ordained ministry was stressed in its designation as the ministry of the Word, there was an essential functional corollary which followed from this emphasis:

'These will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church.'<sup>3</sup>

This sentence is to be understood in relation to the concluding statement of paragraph fourteen:

'The Uniting Church recognises that the type and duration of ministries to which men and women are called vary from time to time and

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1. For a discussion of the Basis' conception of Christ as the Word see the editor's 'Introduction' to M. Owen (ed.), Witness of Faith - Historic Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1984, pp.6-8.
  2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.14.
  3. Ibid., pp.14f.

place to place, and that in particular she comes into being in a period of reconsideration of traditional forms of the ministry, and of renewed participation of all the people of God in the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the building up of the fellowship in mutual love, in commitment to Christ's mission, and in service of the world for which he died.<sup>1</sup>

The three-fold function of the ordained ministry could no longer be affirmed, without qualification, to be that which distinguished ministers of the Word from other members of the church, in view of the fact and likelihood of a 'renewed participation of all the people of God' in that function. But by virtue of the 'distinctive character' of the ordained ministry in its relation to the constitutive work of Christ the Word, ministers of the Word in particular will preach, administer the sacraments and be pastors of the people. It is most important that this functional corollary was expressed in terms which brought together ordained and lay ministries. The three-fold function of the minister of the Word is directed towards the facilitation of the many functions of ministry in the church to the end that 'the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church' be maintained. The equipment of the people for their 'particular ministries' was not added as a fourth aspect to the three-fold function of ministers of the Word, but was affirmed as the immediate purpose for which ministers are set apart and of preaching, administering the sacraments and exercising pastoral care.<sup>2</sup> Through the service of ministers of the Word Christ causes and enables the church to be, and, to use McCaughey's paraphrase again, the church so constituted is 'a body with many members and with as many ministries as members'. Only through such a body is 'the apostolic witness to Christ' maintained.

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1. Ibid., p.16.

2. This bears close comparison to the addition of 'mission' as the mark which underlies the traditional marks of the church.

(c) Ministers are members

But the identification of special ministries in paragraph fourteen did not end with ministers of the Word. For as much as the Uniting Church will seek among its members those called and set apart by God for this ministry, it will also expectantly look for those gifted by God for eldership, the diaconate and lay preaching. Our use of the term 'special ministry' therefore does not refer just to the ordained - only one of the four ministries identified in paragraph fourteen was to be regulated through the act of ordination. A 'special ministry' is one which the church is confident will be continually given by God, such that its 'corresponding service' be provided for by the church through a regular office.

Although it had been affirmed that there is 'a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service', only four such gifts of ministry were singled out in the formal ordering of the church provided in the Basis. But again, the possibility of isolating these special ministries from the many ministries was excluded. It had been excluded in paragraph thirteen by the affirmation that 'all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ'. This understanding was reflected in the introduction to paragraph fourteen in the undertaking of the Uniting Church to 'recognise among her members' those called to special ministries. And this perspective was underscored with a refrain which occurred in the four sub-paragraphs. Of ministers of the Word it was said, 'Such members will be called Ministers'; of elders or leaders, 'Such members will be called Elders or Leaders'; of deaconesses, 'Such members will be called Deaconesses'; and of lay preachers, 'Such members will be called Lay Preachers'.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.15f.

If paragraph thirteen had stressed that members are ministers, paragraph fourteen replied that ministers are members.

Having undertaken to recognise and accept elders, deacons and leaders in good standing in the uniting churches, who would 'adhere to the Basis of Union', as 'elders or leaders' in the Uniting Church, sub-paragraph (b) continued:

'She will seek to recognise in the congregation those endowed by the Spirit with gifts fitting them for rule and oversight.'<sup>1</sup>

Later, in paragraph fifteen (b), it was stipulated that the 'Elders' or Leaders' Meeting' would consist of 'the minister and those who are called to share with him in oversight'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the elder's ministry of rule and oversight is exercised by individual members of the congregation, in counsel with the group of elders and the minister with whom they share in this ministry. There are two sides to this coin. First, while there are personal responsibilities involved in the office, the ministry of the elder involves him especially in a corporate exercise of episcopate. This responsibility for 'building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world'<sup>3</sup> is shared by the elders in their council and with the minister. Second, the minister's responsibility for oversight, his pastoral ministry, is not only personal but has a corporate aspect in that it is shared with the elders' council. This understanding led Bruce Upham to observe that:

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1. Ibid., p.15.

2. Ibid., p.17.

3. Ibid.

'... every Minister, whether he is in a one-minister parish or in a team ministry, is in fact in a collegiate situation, where the Minister of the Word is surrounded by a college of Elders.'<sup>1</sup>

In paragraph fourteen (c), deaconesses in good standing in the uniting churches, who would 'adhere to the Basis of Union', were recognised and accepted as deaconesses in the Uniting Church. Expressing the belief that the Holy Spirit 'will continue to call women to share in this way in the varied services and witness of the Church', the Basis required that provision be made for the perpetuation of this office. An interesting undertaking followed, reflecting both the interest aroused by the earlier proposals for the introduction of a diaconate and the inconclusive results of the discussion of those proposals:

'The Uniting Church recognises that at the time of union many seek a renewal of the diaconate in which men and women offer their time and talents, representatively and on behalf of God's people, in the service of mankind in the face of changing needs. She will so order her life that she remains open to the possibility that God may call men and women into such a renewed diaconate ...'<sup>2</sup>

Churches ready to approach union according to the 'rhythm of the gospel' and, knowing themselves to be in via, affirming an 'openness to the future' can acknowledge quite specific matters concerning the ordering of the united church which remain outstanding on their agenda. And they can make such an acknowledgement in their agreed foundation document. If and when the question of the diaconate is resolved in

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1. B. Upham, 'Ministers and Elders', Trinity Occasional Papers, Brisbane, Vol. I, No.2, May 1982, p.9.
  2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., pp.15f.

the Uniting Church, this portion of the Basis will not thereby be rendered redundant.<sup>1</sup> It expresses in concrete terms both that the way into union was according to the 'rhythm of the gospel' - in spite of the fact that negotiations might have been inconclusive on certain points, the uniting churches could accept one another and unite - and that the Uniting Church is founded on a Basis which affirms an 'openness to the future' - in spite of the fact that the Basis committed the Uniting Church to the possible adoption of an office which was at the time an 'unknown quantity', the uniting churches could accept one another and unite.

In paragraph fourteen (d), accredited lay preachers in good standing in the uniting churches, who would 'adhere to the Basis of Union', were recognised and accepted as lay preachers in the Uniting Church.

The sub-paragraph continued:

'She will seek to recognise those endowed with the gift of the Spirit for this task, will provide for their training, and will gladly wait upon the fuller understanding of the obedience of the Christian man which should flow from their ministry.'<sup>2</sup>

Only in this context, qualifying the noun 'preachers', did the adjective 'lay' appear in the Basis of Union. Although this was a received usage, the brief description of the ministry of the lay preacher given in this sub-paragraph supports the supposition that the adjective should be stressed. It would be artificial to make a strict differentiation between the preaching of a minister of the Word and the preaching of a lay preacher, but there is an emphasis which distinguishes the latter from the former.

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1. To assess present progress on the question of the diaconate in the UCA, see The Diaconate - A Statement for Study and Comment, published for the Assembly Commission on Doctrine of the UCA, Melbourne, 1982.

2. Op. cit., p.16.

The minister of the Word was required to preach from the scriptures; to preach a message 'controlled by the Biblical witnesses'.<sup>1</sup> He was also required to study the confessional documents mentioned in the Basis so that the people might be reminded of 'the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture'<sup>2</sup> - and we might infer that this reminder would be conveyed from the pulpit, as well as in the study group and on any occasion which allowed. There was in this respect an emphasis on the announcement of the given message when the Basis referred to the preaching of the minister of the Word. In paragraph fourteen (d) the emphasis was placed on the reception of that message as the 'Christian man', the lay preacher, offers through his witness a 'fuller understanding of the obedience of the Christian man'.<sup>3</sup>

Of course the lay preacher must equally be required to preach a message derived from the scriptures, and a message which communicates the news of justifying grace, of Christ the justifier and of the need for 'a constant appeal' to scripture. To this end the Uniting Church undertakes to provide for his training. But it is the lay preacher who is able, and is enabled, to preach the message in a way that announces what the 'obedience of the Christian man', the reception of the given message, really means. With this understanding it makes perfect sense that on occasions the minister will sit in the congregation with his fellow members while the lay preacher occupies the

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1. Ibid., p.11 (para. 5).

2. Ibid., p.13 (para. 9).

3. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union, op. cit., pp.80f.



pulpit. The lay preacher does not primarily serve as a 'stand in' when the minister is absent, but has a distinctive service to perform. We mention, though it is made clear in the Basis, that not just anyone should preach in this way, but those who are recognised to be 'endowed with the gift of the Spirit for this task' and who have been suitably trained by the church which will 'gladly wait' on their ministry.

Persons exercising the special ministries mentioned in paragraph fourteen were required in each case to 'adhere to the Basis of Union'. In the 1971 edition of the Basis, an explanatory note was added to this paragraph:

'... the phrase 'adhere to the Basis of Union' is understood as willingness to live and work within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church as that way is described in this Basis. Such adherence allows for difference of opinion in matters which do not enter into the substance of the faith.'<sup>1</sup>

'Adherence' so described, for as much as it calls for an informed decision on the part of the person who will perform one of the special ministries, is not primarily an intellectual exercise. Rather it involves an attitude, 'willingness', by which one accepts the responsibilities of ministry, 'to live and work', in the church of God. Thus 'adherence' is not so much a matter of intellect as of action. To adhere to the Basis of Union is effectively to accept the call to ministry, to engage in service, within a particular fellowship of the one church. McCaughey described the kind of decision implied by such 'adherence':

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1. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.16.

'... when I adhere to the Basis as a minister, elder, deacon/deaconess, lay preacher, I say: 'This is where I belong; this is the people with whom I wish to identify myself; this is the company with whom I would worship - God's people, called in Abraham, reconstituted in Jesus Christ, living by faith and love and hope in him; with this fellowship made available to me in the Uniting Church in Australia, I would wish to work'.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly a 'way' was 'described in the Basis' according to which ministers and other members of the Uniting Church would 'live and work within the faith and unity' of the church - worshipping, witnessing and serving within the one mission of Christ, sharing their gifts of ministry, listening to and preaching from the scriptures, celebrating the sacraments, making use of the creeds and confessions, and participating in the tradition of modern scholarship, and so being continually renewed in faith and mission. But whether the 'substance of the faith' was to be similarly gleaned from the Basis was not so clear. If 'substance' meant an articulated definition of Christian belief, then it was not - and the critics of the Basis maintained an attack on this front to the point of overkill.<sup>2</sup> The last sentence of the statement concerning 'adherence', in spite of similarities in wording and in spite of its inclusion being at the request of the Presbyterian General Assembly,<sup>3</sup> did not amount to the same thing as the familiar statement:

'The Presbyterian Church of Australia holds as its subordinate standard the Westminster

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1. J. D. McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union, op. cit., p.81.
  2. Cf., e.g., A Critique of the Proposed Basis of Union, 1971, op. cit., p.8; and J. F. Boyal, 'So Slight in its Content, Extreme in Implication, Exclusive in Practice', op. cit.
  3. See, I. Gillman and D. A. Wood, Towards an Informed Decision, op. cit., p.28.

Confession of Faith, recognising liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the Faith ...'<sup>1</sup>

But 'adherence' had already been described in terms of 'living' and 'working'. In being asked to 'adhere' to the Basis, a minister was not being questioned concerning his grasp of the faith as much as he was being questioned concerning the faith by which he was grasped and his willingness to be continually renewed in that faith and in mission - in fellowship with that company of God's people to be called the Uniting Church in Australia:

'Within faith, that is trusting in God along with other people, I shall come to understand more fully that by which I am held, I shall come to know the One who called me ... Whether differences do or do not enter into the substance of the faith is a matter for the Church itself to decide : on critical matters we must leave ourselves in her hands.'<sup>2</sup>

(iv) Government and law, 'on the way to the promised end'

So it was that the Basis moved, in paragraph fifteen, to the consideration of the 'series of inter-related councils' which would govern the Uniting Church, each having 'its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world'.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Congregation, the Elders' or Leaders' Meeting, and the Presbytery, to which we have already referred, the Uniting Church would be served at

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1. The Book of Common Order of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Oxford University Press, London and Melbourne, second edition 1965, p.178.
  2. J. D. McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union, op. cit., p.81.
  3. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.17.

a regional level by the Synod and at the national level by the Assembly. Of these five councils, the Basis affirmed that:

'The Uniting Church recognises that responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid on them ... The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to her through any of her councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey his will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to the other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the gospel.'<sup>1</sup>

The oversight of the church, episcopate, was thus affirmed as a corporate responsibility under Christ. The church will be governed through the process of taking counsel together as it waits on God's Word to renew it in faith and mission. This conciliarity was based on the recognition that the responsibility for the church's government 'belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks' he has given them. Each council of representatives gifted by God for the task of government has the dignity which attends such gifting, and may be expected to be the instrument through which Christ addresses his church. So there could be no question of hierarchy, of an ascending order of rank and power, but conciliar government on this basis could only involve a genuinely 'inter-related' series of councils:

'Under Christ, not only is the ministry seen as belonging to the whole people of God, but the Basis sees that responsibility for government in the Church belongs also to them. Gifts for government are bestowed by the Spirit, no less than gifts for ministry.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.16f.

2. I. Gillman and D'A. Wood, Towards an Informed Decision, op. cit., p.29.

Similarly, just as the essential inter-relatedness of ministries had been stressed, so too was the inter-relatedness of councils emphasised; each recognising 'the limits of its own authority' and each giving 'heed to the other councils of the Church', to the end that 'the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel'. As McCaughey later explained:

'The concept of inter-related councils derives from the Church's understanding of herself as a body whose members have been equipped with a diversity of gifts and called to a variety of services.'<sup>1</sup>

In paragraph sixteen the stress placed on corporate episcopate was tempered by an affirmation which reflected the discussion of the earlier proposals for the adoption of the office of bishop, and the genuine interest in the uniting churches for a recovery of a personal and pastoral dimension in church government:

'The Uniting Church recognises the responsibility and freedom which belong to councils to acknowledge gifts among members for the fulfilment of particular functions. She sees in pastoral care exercised personally on behalf of the Church an expression of the fact that God always deals with men personally : he would have his fatherly care known among men; he would have individual members take upon themselves the form of a servant.'<sup>2</sup>

The uniting churches' interest in the personal and pastoral dimension of government had fallen short of an endorsement of the proposals for the introduction of bishops, and this paragraph too avoided that particular conclusion. But it did insist that the fundamental, and

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1. J. D. McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union, op. cit., p.88.
  2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.19.

largely agreed, principle not be lost. It encouraged councils to be ready to recognise the pastor in their midst, aware that God 'would have his fatherly care known among men', and to be prepared to respond to the opportunity provided by God who 'would have individual members take upon themselves the form of a servant'.<sup>1</sup>

Voices of alarm were raised, particularly by Presbyterian critics of the Basis, at the statements concerning the government of the church. Ron Clark attacked the 'ineffective government' described in the Basis, seeing it as inevitably leading to a 'minister dominated church'. Since elders were no longer to be ordained to their service, he supposed that the membership of their council would be constantly changing, 'thus making for weakness'. In the face of a 'weakened' council of elders 'ministers must dominate'. He was suspicious too of the provision for the Congregation to appoint representatives to Presbytery who might not be elders.<sup>2</sup> The 'Presbyterian Church Association' was also worried by this kind of provision. Members other than elders could be involved in the oversight of the local congregation. Representatives to Presbyteries and Synods could be appointed by the Congregation and 'not by the immediate inferior council'. And representatives to Synods and the Assembly could be appointed by 'the council concerned, or one higher':

'Thus there is a wide departure from the Presbyterian principle of a direct ascending hierarchy of Church courts, with a provision for Congregationalist ultra-democracy at the base and centralised Methodist bureaucracy from the summit.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. For a report on the developments in the area of 'Personal Episcopate' in UCA Presbyteries, see D. Brandon, Presbyteries : Alive and Well - A Study of Presbytery Life in the Uniting Church in Australia, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1981, pp.76-85.
  2. R. Clark and S. McCafferty, Here We Stand - A positive viewpoint against the Proposed Basis of Union of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in Australia, pamphlet, (undated - circa 1971), 2.4.
  3. A Critique of the Proposed Basis of Union, 1971, op. cit., p.10.

Alan Dougan, an enthusiastic supporter of the 1963 Basis, deplored what he saw as an over-emphasis on the 'royal priesthood' to the detriment of the elder, in his traditional ruling office, and of the presbytery, as the 'collegiate bishop'. Of the enhanced governmental function of the Congregation in the new Basis and the conditional authority of the 'higher' councils, he confessed that 'I cannot help saying that history gives me little encouragement to accept that proposed reversal'.<sup>1</sup>

Criticisms such as these reflected a more general anxiety over the singular lack of constitutional detail in the Basis. Though this 'deficiency' was more pronounced in the 1971 revision than in the 1963 proposals, it reflected the same deliberate decision on the part of the Commission that this union was to be built on a theological basis. The essential issues were theological not constitutional, arising from the faith of the church - the revelation/message, and the response. And it was on the essential issues that the uniting churches must make their decision.

But this determination invited Keith Burton's rejoinder 'I am far more concerned about practical problems than about theology'.<sup>2</sup> He described the Basis as a 'blank cheque' to be filled in after union. That epithet became a slogan in Presbyterian anti-union lobbying, featuring for example in a full-page advertisement placed in the national journal of that denomination by the 'Presbyterian Church Association'.<sup>3</sup> Fred McKay, the then Moderator-General of the

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1. A. Dougan, 'Time for Co-operation, Not a Merger on Minimal Standards', Australian Presbyterian Life, 11th September, 1971, p.5.
  2. K. Burton, 'The Basis of Union Does Not Deal With Practical Questions', Australian Presbyterian Life, 14th August, 1971, p.6.
  3. Australian Presbyterian Life, 26th February, 1972, p.20.

Presbyterian General Assembly, offered a personal word in his contribution to the debate:

'Personally, I experience a mixture of agony and exhilaration in going out into the unknown, so long as my faith in the Risen Lord is sure. This, I guess, is the way the pioneer Christian has always moved. He has not worried about safety and security, but, under God's grace, he has found them in fuller measure than he ever imagined.'<sup>1</sup>

And he reminded Presbyterians of the essential issue which was to inform their decision on the Basis:

'The Church is never an end in its own right. It's real business is acting as the servant of the mission of God ... The whole debate on the Basis of Union with our sister denominations therefore, revolves around the question of our preparedness to be servants of God's mission in obedience to Christ, whatever the cost.'<sup>2</sup>

If the uniting churches were being asked to sign a 'blank cheque', then the intention was that it be made payable to Christ, who was calling them to an open-ended commitment to his mission.

In the final paragraphs of the Basis, it was made clear that the risks involved in being open to Christ's call were not to be removed after union. Paragraph seventeen represented, according to McCaughey, 'an innovation in schemes of union',<sup>3</sup> in its treatment of church law. Here was the acknowledgement that the 'demand of the Gospel, the

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1. F. McKay, 'Heads Will Be Counted And We Will Not Be 'The Same Again', Australian Presbyterian Life, 9th October, 1971, p.4.
  2. Ibid.
  3. J. D. McCaughey, 'Union Gains Real Significance When Church Is Renewed', Australian Presbyterian Life, 19th June, 1971, p.5.



response of the Church to the Gospel, and the discipline which it requires' are 'partly expressed' in the laws formulated by the church.<sup>1</sup> In its law, the church attempts to 'confess God's will for the life of the Church'. But such law, being 'received by man and framed by him', must be continually subject to revision as the church strives to 'better serve the Gospel':

'The Uniting Church will keep her law under constant review so that her life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and man, and her worship to a true and faithful setting forth of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ. The law of the Church will speak of the free obedience of the children of God, and will look to the final reconciliation of mankind under God's sovereign grace.'<sup>2</sup>

Church law is not provided to constrain obedience to itself, but to enable obedience to God - an obedience which is primarily not the observation of an external and arbitrary rule, but the 'free obedience of the children of God'. The end of such obedience, 'the final reconciliation of mankind under God's sovereign grace', is precisely that which was identified in paragraph three as the object of the mission to which the church is called. In the formulation and review of its law, the church must never lose sight of whose she is and the mission to which she is called by her relationship to that One. The gospel must be ringing in the lawyer's ears.

In paragraph eighteen the Basis ended where it had begun, with the affirmation that the Uniting Church is only one part of the greater company of the people of God. With its admission of fallibility, its supplication for correction, its petition for wider unity,

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1. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.19.

2. Ibid.

and its offering and dedication of its life to the service of God, the Uniting Church was committed in this paragraph, as throughout the Basis, to an on-going journey in faith and mission:

'The Uniting Church affirms that she belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. She prays God that, through the gift of the Spirit, he will constantly correct that which is erroneous in her life, will bring her into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use her worship, witness and service to his eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.'<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid.

## Conclusion

### Four Characteristic Emphases

- (i) The priority of the message of Christ
- (ii) A membership gifted for ministry
- (iii) The ministry of the Word
- (iv) Collegiality and Conciliarity

There is no 'doctrine' of ministry laid down in the Basis of Union; no articulated, ontological definition to which the Uniting Church might retreat in time of controversy; no generalised propositions which bear abstraction from that which is provided in the Basis, namely, the message of the sovereign grace of God and the summons to renewal in faith and mission. But, while prescribing no 'doctrine' as such, in the course of its eighteen paragraphs the Basis does set forth theological affirmations which evoke a certain understanding of ministry, require a certain response which is itself ministry, and which can guide the church which from time to time needs to complete the sentence, 'Ministry is ...'.

That questions concerning ministry were presented as the matter of 'first priority' to the Commission on Doctrine by the Assembly Standing Committee only three years after union, reflects the absence of doctrinal definition in the Basis. But equally, the fact that the Commission's Report provided a response built on affirmations contained in the Basis, illustrates the guiding function of that document. In responding to the 'feeling of uncertainty about the distinctive role of the minister of the Word and the relation between that ministry and other ministries within the Church', the Commission on Doctrine adopted a methodology employed in the Basis, affirming, 'We believe that the Church's answer to these questions must arise out of its understanding of the gospel'.<sup>1</sup> In the articles setting forth the gospel, the Commission referred in each case to the relevant paragraphs in the Basis. Only then did they offer an extrapolation of the Basis'

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1. Assembly Commission on Doctrine, 'Report to the Third Assembly, May 1982', typescript, Melbourne, 1982, pp.1f.

affirmations concerning ministry.<sup>1</sup>

In concluding the present study, therefore, we suggest four emphases that are to be found in the Basis of Union which, while not constituting a 'doctrine' of ministry, identify that which is characteristic of the understanding of ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia.

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(i) The priority of the message of Christ

There is an essential consequentiality about ministry, as it is understood in the Basis of Union, flowing from the acknowledgement of and emphatic insistence upon the priority of the message of Christ. Before one can talk about what ministers are and do, one must talk about what Christ is and does. And this Christ-talk - which is really theology since there is no isolation of the being and doing of Christ from the being and doing of the triune God - takes the form of a message. The pivotal affirmations in this respect are to be found in paragraph four:

'The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because her Lord comes, addresses, and deals with men in and through the news of his completed work.'<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.2f and pp.6-8.

2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.11.

There is no part of the life ('to live') or ordering ('to endure') of the church which is self-initiated or self-perpetuated. In the news of the completed work of Christ the church hears of that which is the sole source of its life and order. This news is of the three-fold ministry which Christ fulfilled before his witnesses. His was a prophetic ministry, in which he 'announced the sovereign grace of God'. His was a priestly ministry, in which 'He himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain'. His was a royal ministry in which God raised him 'to live and reign'.<sup>1</sup> It is by warrant of this completed work of Christ, signified in baptism, that he 'initiates men into his life and mission in the world'.<sup>2</sup>

It is only because of what Christ has done that the church in its members has life; and it is precisely because of what Christ has done that the church in its members has a mission. Thus there is no part of the life of the church which is not consequential to the news of Christ's completed work, and no part of the ordering of the church for mission which is not consequential to the news of Christ's completed work.

In the context of our present interest, this means that any form of ministry which is perceived to be self-initiated or self-perpetuated has been misconstrued. So, for example, in their Second Report the Joint Commission had maintained that an ordained ministry 'set aside in orderly succession by prayer and the laying on of hands, is essential to the well-being of the Church', but only because they 'would

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1. Ibid., p.10, para. 3.

2. Ibid., p.12, para. 7.

emphasise the 'given' nature of this ministry'.<sup>1</sup> The 'orderly succession' is not in any sense a self-perpetuation of ministry, but only a sign of that which is 'given'.

Further, while ministry is to be understood as consequential to the news of Christ's completed work, it is also to be seen that consequential to the news of Christ's completed work is ministry. Christ the Word 'is present when he is preached'. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ himself 'reaches out to command men's attention and awaken their faith', causing and enabling them to be his church.<sup>2</sup> The church so made is called to participate in the ministry and mission of Christ himself:

'... to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.'<sup>3</sup>

Thus, ministry is consequential to the message of Christ in this second sense, that to have one's 'attention commanded' and 'faith awakened' by the news of his completed work is to be summoned to service; to be enlisted in his missionary church as a minister.

(ii) A membership gifted for ministry

So we have introduced a second characteristic emphasis in the understanding of ministry in the Basis of Union, namely, that in the economy of Christ's missionary church all members are ministers:

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1. The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering, *op. cit.*, pp.32f.
  2. The Basis of Union, *op. cit.*, p.11, para. 4.
  3. Ibid., pp.10f, para. 3.

'She acknowledges that the one Spirit has endowed the members of his Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service : all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

The Basis includes a continuing affirmation that the church which is made, and is made visible, in and through worship<sup>2</sup> is missionary; and missionary in all its members. The Word of God, who is heard in 'preaching controlled by the Biblical witnesses', summons the hearer to life and mission, and to her own ministry within that life and mission.<sup>3</sup> Baptism is the sacrament, signifying this message, by which Christ 'initiates men into his life and mission'.<sup>4</sup> The Lord's Supper is the sacrament, signifying this message, by which the people of God are 'strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ'.<sup>5</sup> Confirmation, in its relation to the sacramental signs of this message, is one of the 'ways' by which baptized members are 'led to deeper commitment to the faith and service into which they have been baptised'.<sup>6</sup>

There are two aspects to this emphasis on an equation between membership and ministry. First, since membership implies ministry, members must be reminded that to belong to the church is to be enlisted by Christ for service. A member must be awake to the Spirit's gifting and ready to engage in the 'corresponding service'. In some respects

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1. Ibid., p.14, para. 13.

2. Cf. ibid., p.11, para. 4, and p.17, para. 15(a).

3. Cf. ibid., pp.10f, paras. 3, 4 and 5.

4. Ibid., p.12, para. 7.

5. Ibid., p.12, para. 8.

6. Ibid., pp.13f, para. 12.



the Basis lays less stress on the benefits of membership than on the obligations of membership. But such obligation is to be neither grudgingly nor dourly born, but accepted with thanksgiving as part of the gifting of the Spirit whom Christ has given 'as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation which is the end in view for the whole creation'.<sup>1</sup> The gifts which members have received are to be employed as a sign and instrument<sup>2</sup> of Christ's work, as the church journeys towards an end which is 'promised' and not threatened.

But the implications of this emphasis for members is actually stressed less in the Basis than its second aspect. The import of the affirmations concerning the ministries of members is primarily directed towards the ministers and councils of the Uniting Church having responsibility for the oversight of its congregations. Paragraph thirteen concludes with an undertaking to 'provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them'.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, ministers of the Word are to exercise their ministry 'so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries'.<sup>4</sup> The council of Elders has a responsibility to lead the congregation 'into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world'.<sup>5</sup> And the council of the Presbytery has a responsibility to the congregations in its care, 'exhorting them to fulfil their high calling in Christ Jesus'.<sup>6</sup> The

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1. Ibid., p.10, para. 3.

2. Cf. ibid., and cf. the use of the term 'sign and instrument' in M. Thurian, Priesthood and Ministry, op. cit., pp.10, 27, 29, 35 and 78.

3. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.14.

4. Ibid., p.14, para. 14(a).

5. Ibid., p.17, para. 15(b).

6. Ibid., p.18, para. 15(c).

Basis' call is not so much to members, that they not neglect their gifts, as it is to the church, that it not neglect the gifts of its members:

'We acknowledge that there is no man or woman in the church who does not have his or her distinctive service to perform; and that it is part of the function of the church to perceive the gifts in her members which lead to the performance of those services.'<sup>1</sup>

In paragraph fourteen the special ministries are described in terms of the tasks and responsibilities attending certain gifts. This approach to the specified gifts of ministry applies also to the unspecified gifts of ministry which are acknowledged in paragraph thirteen. A gift is not received aright, by the individual or by the church for which the gift is given, until it is acknowledged to have its 'corresponding service' and is employed in mission. Ministry is functional, especially in the sense that gifts of ministry have function and must be enabled to function in the missionary church. But members' ministries are not to be perceived in functional terms alone, since their functioning has a special dignity in being signs and instruments of the work of Christ. This significance and instrumentality consists in that 'all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ'. The responsibility for the finding and facilitating of gifts of ministry among the church's members rests most heavily on the ministers and councils who have oversight of its congregations.

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1. J. D. McCaughey, 'Preface' to the 1978 edition of The Faith of the Church, op. cit., p.6.

(iii) The ministry of the Word

The stress placed on the giftedness of the church's membership for ministry is in no way softened, let alone contradicted, by the emphasis on the distinctive character of the ministry of the Word in the Basis of Union. This third emphasis does not disrupt, but is a necessary and vital element in, a thematically concordant whole. It is the emphasis on the priority of the message of Christ, and on the dignity of members' ministries and their functional significance within the missionary church, which demands the accompanying emphasis on the distinctive character of the ministry of the Word. This finds expression in the two sentences in paragraph fourteen which are central to the understanding of the ministry of the Word. First, it is affirmed that:

'Since the Church lives by the power of the Word, she is assured that God, who has never left himself without witness to that Word, will, through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word.'<sup>1</sup>

It is the emphasis on the priority of the message of Christ which is dominant in this sentence. The Word is 'Christ who is present when he is preached';<sup>2</sup> who is 'to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church';<sup>3</sup> who 'acts in and through' the church's celebration of the sacraments 'as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures'.<sup>4</sup> It is

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1. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.14(a).

2. Ibid., p.11, para. 4.

3. Ibid., p.11, para. 5.

4. Ibid., p.11, paras. 5 and 6.

Christ himself who is the life-giver, causing and enabling his church to be, 'in and through the news of his completed work'. In short, there can be no church where there are not those witnesses, called and set apart by God in every generation, who announce the message through which Christ the Word acts. While it is affirmed that 'every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant',<sup>1</sup> it is also being affirmed in paragraph fourteen that the message of Christ is of such priority, and so basic to the life of the church, that God will never leave the church without members whose specific vocation it is to proclaim that news through which Christ 'constitutes, rules and renews'<sup>2</sup> his church. Thus, 'human witness in word and action',<sup>3</sup> provided by those members whom God calls and sets apart to be ministers of the Word, is essential to the life of the church.

But these members are not called and set apart from the membership, but are called and set apart within the membership. So, the second sentence emphasises that the minister of the Word serves within a membership gifted for ministry:

'These will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church.'<sup>4</sup>

Ministry of the Word is essential to the life of the church just because its members must be equipped for their particular ministries;

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1. Ibid., p.14, para. 13.

2. Ibid., p.11, para. 4.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p.14f, para. 14(a).

an equipment which is accomplished in the encounter with Christ the Word in and through the announcement of his message in word and action. The immediate purpose of the ministry of the Word is to facilitate the ministries of the members of the church to the end that 'the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church' be maintained.<sup>1</sup> The ministry of the Word has neither function nor significance except in relation to the congregation, which is 'the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church'.<sup>2</sup>

The ministry of the Word is described in functional terms in these two sentences. In relation to the message of Christ, the minister of the Word is a witness. In relation to the ministries of members, the minister of the Word is a facilitator. And in relation to both, the minister of the Word is called and set apart to proclaim the news of Christ's completed work in word and action. But it is somewhat deceptive to describe this as a merely functional view of ministry. As Harry Wardlaw has observed, 'how one can describe the charge to bring the Word of God to expression among God's people as mere is hard to understand'.<sup>3</sup> 'Words and actions' are certainly functions, but in

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1. In his survey of Uniting Church ministers in New South Wales, in 1978, Peter Oliver found that the majority of respondents, when asked to rank seven suggested roles in order of importance, gave first priority to the role of 'preacher'. The second largest number of respondents gave first priority to the role of 'enabler (of people for mission)'. See, P. Oliver, Ordination, Authority and the Church - Past, Present and Future, unpublished thesis, United Theological College, Sydney, 1980, pp.37f. This response is illustrative of a characteristic, though not unique, understanding of ministry of the Word in the Uniting Church : according to the Basis the preacher is the 'enabler'.
  2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.17, para. 15(a).
  3. H. Wardlaw, 'Ministry and the Word of God', op. cit., p.6.

and through the 'words and actions' of ministers of the Word Christ himself gives life to the church. Their ministry is of functional significance in the life of the church as a sign and instrument of Christ the Word.

In many ways it is the treatment of ordination in the Basis of Union which highlights that which is characteristic of the understanding of ministry of the Word in the Uniting Church. Ordination is discussed in paragraph fourteen of the Basis, and the questions to be put to ordinands at their ordination were appended to the 1971 edition.<sup>1</sup> It is stipulated that the Presbytery ordains:

'... by prayer and the laying on of hands in the presence of a worshipping congregation. In this act of ordination the Church praises the ascended Christ for conferring gifts upon men. She recognises his call of the individual to be his minister; she prays for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to equip him for that service. By the participation in the act of ordination of those already ordained, the Church bears witness to God's faithfulness and declares the hope by which she lives.'<sup>2</sup>

Ordination takes place in the context of the congregation at worship. It is itself an act of worship : it has, naturally enough, liturgical form, but it also has liturgical function and significance.

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1. These questions appear also in the liturgy for the Ordination of a Minister of the Word, published by the Uniting Church Press for the UCA Assembly Commission on Liturgy, Melbourne, 1983, pp.12f. It is significant that the response of the Commission on Doctrine to the 'feeling of uncertainty about the distinctive role of the minister of the Word and the relation between that ministry and other ministries within the Church' was to publish its 1982 Report on ordination : Ordination - A Statement for Study and Comment, the Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1982.
  2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.15, para. 14(a).

It is an act of praise to the 'ascended Christ for conferring gifts upon men'. It is a thanksgiving to Christ in which the church 'recognises his call of the individual to be his minister'. It is an invocation and petitioning in which the church 'prays for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to equip him for that service'. It is a proclamation in which 'the Church bears witness to God's faithfulness and declares the hope by which she lives'. Using such language, evocative of the image of worship, the Basis suggests that the act of ordination is primarily to be understood as an act of worship. It has the liturgical function and significance of being an instrument and sign of the encounter between Christ and his people, and as such has a primary relevance to the worshipping congregation. The 'effect' of the act of ordination, for as much as it relates to the individual ordinand and her particular ministry, is especially relevant to the church which is embodied in the worshipping congregation. As an act of worship, ordination is primarily of ecclesial significance. So:

'... the Uniting Church will seek for a renewed understanding of the way in which the congregation participates in ordination and of the significance of ordination in the life of the Church.'<sup>1</sup>

Ordination is not so much presented in terms of its effecting a special relation between Christ and his minister, as it is presented in terms of affirming the special relation between Christ and his church - a relationship, of calling and gifting for mission, of which the minister of Word is a servant.

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1. Ibid.

Among the congregation, worshipping according to the liturgical form of the service of ordination, is one for whom the occasion has significance not only for him as a member of the church, but also for him as an individual : the ordinand. Seven questions to be put to the ordinand during the service of ordination were appended to the Basis:

'(i) Do you, depending upon the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, confess anew Jesus Christ as Lord; and, acknowledging him as the Word of God, do you undertake to set him forth for the salvation of mankind?

I do.

(ii) Do you receive the witness to Christ in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; and do you undertake to preach from these?<sup>1</sup>

I do.

(iii) Do you undertake to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ may be clearly proclaimed and made effective in the lives of believers?

I do.'<sup>2</sup>

A minister of the Word is one who, confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and 'acknowledging him as the Word of God', undertakes to 'set him forth'. Her primary duty is to proclaim Christ the Word. It is not to disseminate a certain body of information, not to be a purveyor of a certain set of ideas, not to be a vendor of 'good advice', but

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1. In the 1970 edition the second part of this sentence read, 'and do you undertake to use these books as containing the texts from which the Church preaches?'. Although this was more overtly reflective of the relevant section of the Basis (para. 5), it 'apparently' gave rise to the misimpression that 'preachers had the right to pick and choose a few words here or there on which to hang their discourse'. See, 'Preface to the 1971 Edition', ibid., p.7.

2. Ibid., pp.23f.



to 'set forth' Jesus Christ the Word of God that a minister of the Word is set apart (although we would grant that information, ideas and even good advice might come from the lips of a minister of the Word). At her ordination a minister of the Word accepts the responsibility of setting forth Christ the Word. To this end she receives the Scriptures' witness to Christ, and agrees that her preaching will be 'controlled by the Biblical witnesses'.<sup>1</sup> And to this end also she undertakes to administer the sacraments 'as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures':<sup>2</sup>

(iv) Do you intend to live in fellowship with all God's people, confessing the name of the One Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the One Spirit, and do you receive for use in instruction and worship the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds?

I do.

(v) Do you adhere to the Basis of Union of this Church?

I do.

(vi) Will you allow your mind to be illuminated, your conscience quickened, and your prayers deepened by the study of the confessional documents specified in the Basis of Union?

I will.'<sup>3</sup>

A minister of the Word is no sectarian functionary, but is set apart within the fellowship of 'all God's people'. In the act of ordination, 'the Uniting Church in Australia acts and speaks as part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church'.<sup>4</sup> The immediate setting of a

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1. Ibid., p.11, para. 5.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.24.

4. Ordination of a Minister of the Word, op. cit., p.12.

minister of the Word, serving within the Uniting Church in Australia, must not obscure the wider context of the church, confessing the one Lord and empowered by the one Spirit, in many times and places. Therefore the minister of the Word will 'receive for use' the creedal expressions of the catholic faith. But the minister of the Word cannot be dislocated from the particularity of the life of God's people, and so she must be ready to commit herself 'to live and work within the faith and unity of the One Catholic and Apostolic Church'<sup>1</sup> as it is embodied in that company of God's people called the Uniting Church in Australia. These people identify themselves with the confessional tradition of the Reformation and the preaching of John Wesley and so, in serving them, the minister of the Word agrees to study the literature of this tradition. He would have already done this in his training as an ordinand, and so be competent to accept such an undertaking. But he is asked to make this study an on-going endeavour; a regular discipline of intellect, conscience and prayer through which he is prepared to confess Christ effectively within the ambience of his people's history of confession:

'(vii) Will you seek the peace of this and all the Churches of God, speaking the truth in love, watching over those people and things entrusted to your charge, obeying lawful authority with a good conscience, committing your ministry to God who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or conceive?  
I will.'<sup>2</sup>

The minister of the Word is one who has responsibilities, not just in the sense of having duties to discharge, functions to perform, but in

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1. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.16, para. 14.

2. Ibid., p.24.

the sense of being in a relationship of response-ability to and with the church. He is responsible to and with the one people of God, or more precisely 'this and all the Churches of God'; to see that what he speaks is 'the truth' and that it is spoken 'in love'; to be a pastor to his people and a steward of 'those things' given to his care; to submit to the 'lawful authority' of the conciliar process in the church 'with a good conscience', accepting the counsel of other members in the exercise of his ministry; and in all of this being responsible to God, of whose Word he is a servant, with the assurance that God 'is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or conceive'. Ministry of the Word is not an individual or private concern, but for as much as it is personal it is also relational - a relationship of service.

The orthodoxy of the ordinand's doctrinal opinions are not being tested in the questions put at ordination. Though continuity in the faith of the church is being called for, this continuity is conceived in a dynamic sense : a continuity in the proclamation of Christ in preaching and the administration of sacraments arising from the scriptures; a continuity in worship and instruction which employs the ancient catholic creeds; a continuity in confessing which is informed and conditioned by a continuing study of the confessional tradition of the reformed churches; and a continuity in the relationship of service within the people of God. If it were simply the intention to apply a test of orthodoxy, the ordinand could 'pass' the test and that would be that. But the questions are put to enable the ordinand to affirm his willingness to engage in a style of life and work through which the church will be maintained in the dynamic continuity of the faith.

In 1977 Davis McCaughey published a paper which raised a series of questions concerning the future and vitality of the Uniting Church and other churches in Australia.<sup>1</sup> His first question concerned 'the integrity of the Christian faith'.<sup>2</sup> He argued that the Uniting Church could 'show the way' in this respect, having in its Basis of Union an expression of commitment to the scriptures, creeds and confessions of the church which was 'at once fuller and more intellectually satisfying' than had been known in the uniting churches in their separation. But he recognised that the survival of this tradition was not guaranteed by the Basis of Union alone.

The church's continuity in the faith required also:

'... the presence among ministers and people of men and women with a passionate interest in the substance of the faith. Perhaps we should call it, a life long love affair with the integrity and substance of the faith.'<sup>3</sup>

Though he took the opportunity to reiterate his special concern for the church's need to support gifted individuals in their disciplined study of theology,<sup>4</sup> McCaughey recognised too that a responsibility for the church's continuity in the faith rested especially on ministers of the Word:

'A sign of its presence among us will be a genuinely educated ministry : men and women who lovingly and reverently care for what the Christian faith has meant at various periods in its

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1. J. D. McCaughey, 'The Uniting Church in Australia - Hopes and Fears', St. Mark's Review, March 1977, No.89, pp.18-22.
  2. Ibid., pp.19f.
  3. Ibid., p.19.
  4. Cf. J. D. McCaughey, 'Current Theology - Australia', op. cit.

history, and for what it might mean in the intellectual, imaginative and cultural context of their own day.<sup>1</sup>

The Basis of Union puts singular stress on the proclamatory function of ministry of the Word.<sup>2</sup> It is the message of Christ which takes priority in the Basis, and it is Christ's work in and through the proclamation of that message that ministers of the Word are called to serve. In its treatment of doctrinal resources - the scriptures, creeds, confessions and modern scholarship - the Basis intimates that these are especially the resources of proclamation. The unavoidable implication of this perspective is that those who are to make the proclamation, the ministers of the Word, must be schooled in the content and skilled in the use of the resources of proclamation. In his sermon at the thanksgiving service of the Inaugural Assembly of the Uniting Church, McCaughey drew attention to this aspect of the Basis. Ministers of the Word must be:

'... trained in a disciplined school, educated in the story of the church's discipleship so that the great tradition into which we have entered may be made vital for our day. The commission comes from a living Lord, who lays upon us all the obligation to teach men to observe all that he has commanded us. To listen to him is the supreme calling of the whole church - of every member; and to do so we need an educated ministry - men and women who, in a special sense, have heard the call to preach the Word.'<sup>3</sup>

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1. J. D. McCaughey, 'The Uniting Church in Australia - Hopes and Fears', op. cit., p.19.
  2. In some respects this stress is made at the expense of an emphasis on the pastoral function. It should be seen, however, that the understanding that proclamation is directed towards the facilitation of members' ministries and that ministry of the Word is exercised in the context of collegiality and conciliarity carries definite pastoral implications.
  3. J. D. McCaughey, 'Christ's Commission', in J. Davis McCaughey and Phillip Potter, Inaugural Addresses - The Uniting Church in Australia, The Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, 1977, p.3.

(iv) Collegiality and Conciliarity

In accordance with the emphases on the priority of the message of Christ, the giftedness of the church's membership for ministry, and the distinctive character of the ministry of the Word in its relation to the message of Christ and the ministries of members, the Basis includes a fourth characteristic emphasis, on collegiality and conciliarity in ministry. It is in a collegial and conciliar context that the message of Christ is proclaimed and heard, and ministries are exercised. In answering the question, 'How is the ordained minister related to other ministries?', the Assembly Commission on Doctrine drew upon this characteristic emphasis:

'The ordained minister, as a minister of the Word of God, is to call every man and woman to his or her distinctive service. The minister will acknowledge his or her need of the others in order that the whole may be built up in love. The ministries will submit themselves to one another out of reverence for Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

Collegiality in ministry is implied throughout the Basis as arising from the message of Christ. As we observed, in the understanding of the Basis, to have one's 'attention commanded' and 'faith awakened'<sup>2</sup> by Christ through the news of his completed work is to be summoned to service; to be enlisted in the missionary church as a minister. To be a member of the church is to belong to 'a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself'.<sup>3</sup> Members of the church are colleagues in ministry. Ministry

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1. 'Report to the Third Assembly', op. cit., p.7.

2. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.11, para. 4.

3. Ibid., pp.10f, para. 3.

is a collegiate responsibility incumbent on the church as a whole, and in all its members.

For the sake of this collegiate ministry the minister of the Word is called and set apart to 'set forth' Christ in word and action - 'so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries'. As Douglas Galbraith has put it:

'The minister's job is not to minister in place of the people but to interact with them and bring out the best of their ministry. There is come and go in the relationship as minister and people each work at developing their part in the ministry of the whole church.'<sup>1</sup>

While it is true that, being 'surrounded by a college of Elders', every minister of the Word 'is in fact in a collegiate situation',<sup>2</sup> it is equally true that the congregation, comprised of people called and gifted for ministry, constitutes a collegiate context for ministry of the Word. Further, the minister of the Word is primarily responsible for the building up of the college of ministers which is the congregation, calling 'every man and woman to his or her distinctive service'.

Conciliarity is equally implied in the Basis. What Galbraith says of 'team ministry', in the more formal sense of teams of set-apart ministers, applies also in a general way: 'Two or three gathered together are not always a team. It is how they interrelate that counts.'<sup>3</sup> As colleagues in ministry members must take counsel

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1. D. Galbraith, 'What is the Future of Team Ministry', Life and Times, Vol. 8, No.15, 12th September, 1984, p.1.
  2. B. Upham, op. cit.
  3. D. Galbraith, op. cit., p.11.

together. This conciliarity finds expression first of all in the council of the congregation. It is not just on those occasions when the congregation meets to hear the reports of its executive, or to make decisions that the conciliarity envisaged in the Basis finds expression. Conciliarity is characteristic of the living and working of the college of ministers which is the congregation, as its members 'meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world.'<sup>1</sup> Writing on the nature and exercise of authority in the church, Dorothy McMahon has said:

'... the vision of Protestantism, at its best, lies in well-developed relationship between the members of the body of Christ involving a continuing dialogue which shapes, and reshapes, faith and truth in the light of the Gospel for both individuals and church. However, it can only fruitfully take place if we, at the same time, encourage each member to trust and contribute their own insights and experience - to honestly be who they are, and to be, in the end accountable to God alone.'<sup>2</sup>

It is because 'all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ',<sup>3</sup> that each member of the college of ministers which is the congregation must 'acknowledge his or her need of the others', and be, in turn, acknowledged by 'the others' as being needed, 'in order that the whole may be built up in love'. And, as the Commission on Doctrine affirmed, it is the minister of the Word who takes the lead in the acknowledgment of need.

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1. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.17, para. 15(a).
  2. D. McMahon, 'Two Questions For Ministry', Trinity Occasional Papers, Vol. 3, No.1, February 1984, p.44.
  3. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.14, para. 13.



In the local life of the church conciliarity is also expressed in the council of elders who, together with the minister of the Word, take counsel together in the exercise of their collegiate responsibility for 'building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world'.<sup>1</sup> In the election of elders the congregation does not abdicate its responsibility for ministry, nor may these representative members usurp the authority of the rest of the membership for ministry. Elders are elected and commissioned 'to share with the minister in building up the congregation in faith and love'.<sup>2</sup> In their council they seek to work with the minister of the Word in 'building up', 'sustaining' and 'leading' the college of ministers which is the congregation.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.17, para. 15(b).
  2. Assembly Commission on Liturgy, Commissioning of Elders, Lay Preachers and Members of the Parish Council, The Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, 1980, p.4.
  3. Before going any further, it should be recognised that the subject of eldership has been addressed as a matter of urgency in the Uniting Church. The ministry of elders described in the Basis of Union was effectively a new form of ministry, not only for Methodists and Congregationalists, but also for Presbyterians who found that the familiar office of the elder had been redefined for the Uniting Church. The question of the relationship between elders and ministers of the Word was discussed by Bruce Upham in 'Ministers and Elders', op. cit., pp.5-17. In his paper, 'Ought Elders to be Ordained?', Trinity Occasional Papers, Vol. 2, No.1, January 1983, pp.17-22, Upham further examined problems in identifying the specific ministry for which a member is elected and commissioned as an elder. Neil Thorpe has compiled two important reports on surveys of Victorian elders and councils of elders : Things Are Getting Better - A Report on Some Facets of the Eldership and Councils of Elders in the Synod of Victoria, Division of Field Services, Melbourne, 1984, and Elders' Perception of Pastoral Visitation - A Survey of Elders Within the Synod of Victoria, Division of Field Services, Melbourne, 1984.

Government in the Uniting Church is by 'a series of inter-related councils'.<sup>1</sup> Conciliarity is thus perceived to be expressed in the relationship between councils, and, by implication, is thwarted by the disruption of that relationship which would occur when one council sets itself over and against another council.<sup>2</sup> In the questions put at the service for the commissioning of elders, the importance of the inter-relatedness of the council of elders and the council of the congregation is indicated. The candidate for eldership is asked:

'Will you accept this responsibility, committing yourself to follow Christ, to love your neighbours, and to work for the reconciling of the world; will you serve the people, using your energy, intelligence, imagination and love, relying on God's grace and rejoicing in his promises?'<sup>3</sup>

Having been asked whether they accept the candidate for eldership, the congregation is then asked:

'Will you encourage them in love and support them in their ministry, serving with them the one Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church?'<sup>4</sup>

A genuine mutuality between elders and members in ministry is being called for in these exchanges, in which elders and members commit themselves to serve Christ together. Conciliar government does not mean the submission of some to the rule of some others, but submission 'to one another out of reverence for Christ':

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1. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.17, para. 15.
  2. According to Thorpe's findings, the present problem in the Uniting Church is that there is a tendency for the council of the congregation to set itself over and against the council of elders, 'making the elders more accountable to congregational meetings than is desirable or necessary'. Things Are Getting Better, op. cit., p.28.
  3. Commissioning of Elders, Lay Preachers and Members of the Parish Council, op. cit., p.5.
  4. Ibid.

'When our authority becomes the gentle offering of love and truth, like the life of Christ itself, then we will not have people destroyed by it - they will be confronted and challenged to struggle with their realities, but it will be a free and self-respecting relationship with the call of Christ.'<sup>1</sup>

The exercise of ministry in and by the local collegiate must be seen in its wider context too. The congregation must not isolate itself from the wider fellowship of the church, but must be maintained and deepened in the unity of faith and mission of the church. Therefore, in the 'series of inter-related councils' which govern the church there is also the Presbytery, the Synod and the Assembly.<sup>2</sup> That which is distinctive in the local collegiate must never become that which is deviant, and so ministry in the congregation must be exercised in vital inter-relationship with the wider fellowship of the church through its councils. Every council must 'wait upon God's Word ... obey his will in the matters allocated to its oversight ... recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to the other councils of the Church'. Only then will the church 'be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel'<sup>3</sup> - in ministry.

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1. D. McMahon, op. cit., p.45.
  2. We do not discuss these councils here, being primarily interested in ministry which we understand to relate essentially to the localized life and work of the church. The exceptions - e.g. permanent functionaries of presbytery, synod or assembly - must strive to be proof of the rule through serving the renewal and enrichment of the localized life and work of the church. Davis McCaughey, Commentary on the Basis of Union, op. cit., pp.87-93, gives an account of the functions of the five councils mentioned in the Basis of Union.
  3. The Basis of Union, op. cit., p.17, para. 15.

These four emphases, characteristic of the understanding of ministry in the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia, do not constitute a 'doctrine' as such. But they do determine that ambience - of life and work, as well as of thought - within which, and according to which, the Uniting Church from time to time will need to complete the sentence 'Ministry is ...'.

Ministry is consequential to the message of Christ. It arises, as do all things in the life and ordering of the church, from the news of Christ's completed work. As an aspect of church order, ministry has as its only warrant and only measure the content of that message. Further, ministry is the immediate consequence of hearing that message. Through the proclamation of the news of his completed work, Christ himself enlists men and women for service in his missionary church. Ministry is only, but always, the 'second step'. The first was, and is, taken by God in Christ.

Ministry is diverse. It is that to which the church in all its members is called through the message of Christ. It is that for which the church in all its members is equipped through the gifting of the Holy Spirit. Diversity in ministry reflects the diversity within the church, which in all and each of its members is called and equipped for mission. Although the church must be ordered, and forms of ministry regulated, this ordering and regulation must be sufficiently flexible to allow for the diversity of ministry which is the genuine response to the message of Christ and the gifting of the Spirit.

Ministry is orderly. Confident of God's provision for its on-going needs, the church expectantly looks for men and women gifted for special forms of ministry. It seeks to recognize members whom God calls to 'preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the

flock, to share in government and to serve those in need in the world'. The church orders its life in anticipation of God's provision of these gifts of ministry. The church's confidence is expressed especially in its recognition and setting apart of those whom God has called and set apart to be ministers of the Word. In the 'orderly succession' of ministers of the Word, each generation recognizes God's on-going provision of those who will 'set forth' Christ in word and action 'so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries'.

Ministry is exercised in unity. All members exercise their ministry as part of the local collegiate; serving in concert with their colleagues in ministry. The local collegiate is built up and equipped for mission through its life as a council, and is renewed and enriched in one fellowship of faith and mission through its relationship of 'mutual submission' with the other councils of the church.

Ministry is the dynamic, on-going response of God's people to God's Word. The church is renewed in ministry as and because 'her Lord comes, addresses, and deals with men in and through the news of his completed work'. Ministry, in all its aspects and all its forms, is the response of the church to its call:

'to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself ... a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal ...'

Appendix IThe Joint Commission on Church Union

Members named in the First Report (1959):

Congregationalists: W. Albiston  
M. Davies (appointed 1959)  
L. D. Dixon (retired 1959)  
J. Douglas  
H. F. Leatherland  
J. D. Northey  
N. C. Watt  
H. T. Wells

Methodists: G. C. Barber  
R. H. Grove  
W. F. Hambly  
H. G. Secomb  
H. H. Trigge  
\* A. E. Vogt  
A. H. Wood  
B. R. Wyllie

Presbyterians: J. P. Adam  
J. C. Alexander  
\* R. S. Byrnes  
\* A. A. Dougan  
L. G. Geering  
J. D. McCaughey  
J. F. Peter  
J. Priestley  
A. C. Watson

\* Alternates who attended some or all meetings of the Commission.

Additional members named in the Second Report (1963):

Congregationalists: G. L. Barnes  
J. Bennett  
J. F. Dickinson  
J. A. Garrett  
F. Whyte

Presbyterian: W. Cumming Thom

Consultants named in the Second Report:

Crawford Miller  
 Harvey L. Perkins  
 \* Colin Williams  
 \* George S. Yule

\* Consultants co-opted on the Drafting  
 Committee.

Additional members named in The Proposed Basis of Union (1970):

Congregationalists: M. F. Sawyer  
 P. L. Trudinger  
 B. W. Upham

Methodists: I. H. Grimmett  
 A. D. Hunt  
 E. F. Osborne  
 R. L. Walker  
 N. J. Young

Presbyterians: H. E. H. Atkinson  
 I. Gillman  
 D. M. Hodges  
 A. J. Kilgour  
 A. F. Smart

Additional member named in The Basis of Union (1971):

Presbyterian: J. M. Owen

Alternates who attended the November 1970 meeting and were previously  
 unnamed in membership lists were:

Congregationalist: J. F. Dey

Methodist: A. W. Loy

Presbyterian: Crawford Miller (consultant named in the  
 Second Report)

M. Davies, H. T. Wells, R. H. Gove, W. F. Hambly, and J. D.  
 McCaughey are the only persons who are named in all membership lists  
 of the Commission.

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