

The Report of the Conversations Between the Church of England and The Methodist Church of Great Britain *

A Dissident View

By Thomas E. Jessop
The Churches in England

IN ENGLAND the non-Roman churches fall sharply into two groups—the Church of England or “Anglicans,” and the Non-conformist or Free Churches. The Free Churches are the Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Unitarians, the few Moravians, and the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army, although the last two disclaim the title of “Church.” For the purpose of this article the small sects, fewer and weaker than in America, are passed over because they do not appear prominently on the national religious scene. The Church of England, whose formal membership is nearly three times that of all the rest together, is the continuing ancient and medieval church of our land as *modified* in doctrine at the Reformation, when it was also established by law as the church of the realm, a position of great political and social privilege counterbalanced by subjection in certain respects to crown and parliament. The older Nonconformist Churches were *products* of the Reformation: they rejected the episcopal system and the subjection of wholly religious matters to state control, stood for simple forms of worship, and placed emphasis on the preaching of the Word rather than on the sacrament of communion.

Methodism was a latecomer in England. When the “Society of People called Methodists” moved after the death of its founder away from the Church of England and became itself a church, the sense of attachment to the former remained in many of its members, and showed itself in continuing resort to the parish church for communion (a practice that was continued in some Wesleyan families until after the middle of the nineteenth century), though that sense was not shared by all the subsequently received members and adherents. The new church did not arise as a *doctrinal* protest against the episcopal system, nor as a protest against the legal control over order, appointments and forms of worship involved in the state church: it arose because the Church of England would not provide the following: (1) a home for an itinerant ministry across parochial

* In July 1964 METHODIST HISTORY carried an article by Dr. Leslie Davison, Methodist Headquarters, London, which favored the proposed plan of union between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Britain. We are glad to present an opposing view by Dr. Jessop which will no doubt be of interest to American Methodists.—Editor

and diocesan boundaries; (2) a lay ministry in preaching and shepherding; and (3) free and open cordial worship. Because these reasons were not formally doctrinal but were felt as practical necessities, the original Nonconformist Churches did not for some decades receive the Methodist Church with open arms. In time, however, several factors such as their common suffering of certain legal disabilities and their common recoil from the apparently Romanizing tendencies of the Tractarian movement within the Anglican Church caused the mutual coolness to disappear. For at least a hundred years English non-Roman Christians (the adjective seems necessary because many "high" Anglicans dislike being called Protestants) have been divided, by both internal and external recognition, into Anglicans and Nonconformists, with Methodists not as intermediate or marginal but as consciously and very actively in the second group.

This broad line of development was complicated, though not obscured, by a succession of secessions from the first Methodist Church, beginning as early as 1797, some of them later uniting among themselves but remaining outside that parent church. In general, the secessions were anti-authoritarian, not decisively doctrinal. These non-Wesleyan but still Methodist Churches also became welcome and active members of the Nonconformist group. The two largest of them united with the original Wesleyan Church (which had democratized itself) in 1932, forming what was called simply the Methodist Church. The union has been successful at the national and district levels, fairly so at the local level, where there are still some imperfectly co-operating congregations.

The rest of the relevant story is that soon after the First World War, partly in consequence of the national comradeship it had evoked, contacts at moderately high levels, informal rather than formal, were made between Anglicans and Nonconformists; and after the Second World War the process was resumed, moved through more levels, took official form at the highest level, and had more explicitly theological direction. The result is that the long strain between the two primary religious groups has at last been considerably relaxed, for which God be thanked. I write this paragraph as an eye-witness and frequent participant in the forty-odd years' process.

Such is the shortest outline I can draw for American readers of the most general background of the recent conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church. They have ended with a majority Report that recommends the union of the two churches under the Anglican system; which means, in terms of the above outline, that we are being advised to move out of nonconformity. If we do so, nonconformity will be seriously weakened, for we are easily the largest church within it. We have not failed to

unite with any nonconformist church; we have simply not seriously tried. This fact is startling. The only Methodist reference in the Report in this connection is a veiled expression of hope that the other Nonconformist Churches will follow the example we are being urged to set. The aim, then, is one non-Roman Church for England, episcopal and (if crown and parliament will make the large changes involved) "established," that is, the state church so far as England alone is concerned. The reason for this territorial limitation is that the present Church of England has no jurisdiction in Wales, Scotland, or Ireland. The "Anglican" Church in each of these countries is independent. Besides, Scotland has its own state church, which is Presbyterian; and Ireland cannot have an Anglican state church because one part of the island is an independent republic and dominantly Romanist, while the other part is dominantly nonconformist.

The Main Proposals of the Report

The principal features of the Report are governed by two general stipulations—that nothing short of institutional union will suffice, intercommunion and close collaboration as *ends* having been eliminated in the course of the conversations, and that both churches must give a pledge to unite *before* the measures preliminary to union can be put into operation. When this pledge is given, stage one will be inaugurated by two decisive acts. The first will be the solemn union of the two ministries, as the precondition of intercommunion: it is to take the form of a so-called "Service of Reconciliation," to be repeated until all the ordained clergy of both churches have been presented to a presiding officer, who on the Anglican side must be a bishop. Each minister will thereafter be entitled to officiate by invitation in the services of the other church, and members (in the formal sense) of each church will be admitted to communion in the other church. The second act will be (subject to the permission of the crown) the Anglican consecration as bishops of some Methodist ministers, chosen by the conference. Thereafter ordinations into the Methodist ministry must without exception be effected by such duly consecrated bishops. Both acts commit the Methodist Church to a regular observance of the peculiar spiritual prerogatives of the Anglicanized form of the ministry; only bishops would ordain and consecrate, and the celebration of communion by a layman would set a "grave problem." In this first stage of parallel existence the two churches would cultivate fellowship, collaborate increasingly, and together work out the credal, liturgical, constitutional and administrative changes regarded as requisite for full union. The changes that can be authorized for the Church of England by crown and parliament alone would be so numerous that stage one would be somewhat long—it has been suggested,

between ten and twenty-five years. When all is ready, the churches are to become one church under the episcopalian form and, the Anglicans hope, "established."

The Report which makes these proposals was adopted unanimously on the Anglican side; on the Methodist side four of the twelve members signed a dissentient statement. The document was sent down to their lower bodies by the two Anglican convocations and by the Methodist conference in 1963, and it will be debated by these in June and July, 1965, respectively, for decision.

As I happened to be one of the four Methodist dissentients I shall proceed to state my chief criticisms. My most general dissatisfaction with the majority Report is that it keeps to the plane of theology, as though the two churches were simply embodiments of doctrine and not also men and women, or at any rate as though the human aspect were relevant not to decision for or against the main proposals but only to the negotiations that must follow a decision for. I shall have to meet the Report on its own ground, its particular conception of unity, of the church, and of the ministry. Being a layman, I cannot discuss the issues as if I were an academic theologian, and shall therefore relate them to the fundamental view which I have learned, rightly or wrongly, from my nurturing in Methodism.

Christian Unity

That Christians should be one family I take to be axiomatic. What is by no means self-evident is that the family should be a single institution, whether in each country or in the world. The more I have reflected and observed, the more convinced have I become that the notion of family is Christianly the deeper of the two, and that the notion of a church as a highly organized institution arises more from plain human needs, necessities and limitations—plain in the sense of being obvious to our natural wits—than from theological deduction. We cannot dispense with either notion, but the course of church history and our own experience show that there is a tension between them: the larger and more "efficiently" organized a church is, the harder it is to get and keep alive family-sense and family-behavior. The recognition of this tension and the bringing of it as near as may be to equilibrium should surely be one of the constant concerns of ecclesiastical leaders. The shape, instruments and methods of a church are human affairs so far as they have to be tested for their efficacy by experience of their working; the presence and active operation of our filial relation to God through Christ and of our consequent brotherhood is the divine prescription. Any church that actualizes these two is Christianly justified, and would spread the Christian outlook, spirit and behavior by example and contagion. If that is not in the eyes of theo-

logians the whole truth, it is a part of it that we ought never to obscure.

Emphasis on love, which stands in the New Testament even when the scholars have done their severest sifting of it, is not the one adopted in the Report. It is *assumed* that the Johannine text "that they may all be one" means one institution, and that St. Paul was not using a preacher's metaphor, vividly helpful in its context, but uttering a divine declaration about institutional form, when he likened the church to Christ's body. If the physical meaning of "body" be dropped as too crass, and the notion of a "mystical" body be substituted, we have moved away from the idea of *any* institution to that of a purely spiritual unity.

It is undeniable that the churches have not achieved the unity of a family. "Denominationalism," in the odious sense given to it by present day ecumenists, is not dead; we often do feel and behave as rivals. In that sense it is mercifully declining. But the deliberate use of the term to cover the condemnation of all separate churches begs the whole question. If for instance the Church of England and the Methodist Church were to unite, the result would still be a separate institution, a denomination in the innocent descriptive sense, the usual sense in the English tongue: it would need a distinctive name (the choice of which would raise some unlovely passions). Judged by the indispensable criterion of the family-spirit, the sort of denominationalism that is liable to fair questioning is that which closes doors against other denominations. This is what some churches do. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, for example, are not in communion with one another, or with any of the Protestant churches; and the Anglican churches of England and elsewhere are out of communion with almost every non-Roman Church everywhere. At what is regarded by them as the most sacred point of fellowship they exclude fellow-Christians. For admission to communion each of these churches openly rules that it is not enough to be a Christian in conviction, sentiment and conduct: one must be a duly admitted member of a particular *kind* of church. The New Testament idea of a Christian is bent under an institutional idea.

The Report recommends that our Methodist Church combine with one of the institutional churches. It urges this step as a movement toward the unity of *the* church. In fact it will require us sooner or later to exclude from communion almost all non-Anglican Protestants throughout the world—all Lutherans except only the Swedish ones, all Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and the like; indeed all our fellow-Methodists outside that exclusive episcopalian kind, including of course the millions of Methodists in America. In stage one some concessions will have to be allowed to us by the Anglicans, as these recognize, but in the Report their

reluctance is so evident that strong pressure to end them is to be expected. In stage two we become wholly absorbed into the very ecclesiastical system that excludes such concessions on principle. This principle is so strongly a part of the system that if we were to stipulate *now* that *our* principle is that of the "open table," and that we cannot disavow this in stage two as well as in stage one, by the terms of the Report the earlier stage could not be entered into, that is to say, the Report would have to be folded away. In a relevant part of the Methodist statement in the Report there is an attempt to excuse ourselves beforehand for being unable to share communion with our present English fellow-nonconformists in stage two; I can only read it as meaning that the rupture can only be avoided by *them*, by the simple procedure of disavowing *their* "open table" and following us into the Anglican system. Christian unity is thus narrowed into unity in an institution of the traditional form. For this a *too* realistic reason is hinted at, namely, that this is the only feasible form of general unity; which, frankly put, means that the Anglican, Roman and Orthodox Churches possess that form, believe in it, and will not abandon it, and therefore only within that form is a wider unity possible. This is a surrender to fact on a point that raises questions of fundamental doctrine.

In urging the rightness of our own non-exclusiveness I have been openly charged by one of our high officers with complacency and denominationalism in the repugnant sense. His published summary of my position is: "Methodists are right and Anglicans are wrong. On our side the table is open; one 'cannot understand' why it is not open on their side. When it is, there will be no problem, and the Christian good of England will continue to be served best by our present comfortable variety of denominational emphases." The second sentence is an unkind gloss. I have merely said that it would be wrong for us to replace the "open table" with a carefully fenced one. Of course, we English Methodists have faults; but I see no point in adding to them what seems to me to be the doctrinal error of that exclusiveness, and in particular I do not see how our doing so would lessen or remove our indigenous failings. What these foibles are does not fall for discussion in an examination of the proposal that we should unite with the Church of England under the conditions laid down in the Report. Whether the openness of the table is merely one of our "present comfortable denominational emphases" is one of the very issues we have to decide; and it is to be settled not by usage or by consecrating usage, but by asking what sort of God openness implies and what sort closeness.

The Historic Episcopate

The Anglican system in which the restricted table is an integral part rests on a theory of the authentic church, the Holy Catholic

Church as defined by that system. The theory is that the kind of church *willed by God* is an institution that is within the historic episcopate and shapes its constitution and practice so as to preserve the divine authority of that episcopate. The Report is made to turn on this theme. The Anglicans are candid, clear and firm in their statement of both the system and the theory of it. The Methodist majority offer reasons for our acceptance of the system without *necessarily* binding ourselves to the theory that requires it to be undeviatingly observed; but as they do not even hint at the possibility of union outside that system, that is, with one or more of the English nonconformist churches, one must assume that not Christian unity as such but unity in that system is the overriding consideration. The preference for that system is so open that I cannot make it intelligible without supposing that they are drawn toward the theory that the system is a divinely intended one, or at any rate religiously or theologically better than any to be found in English nonconformity. They do not state that we should join the Church of England *despite* that system as a pragmatic way of dealing with an existing crisis; they endorse it.

The theory is that the church was created by Christ's commission to the Apostles, that the first bishops, and they alone, inherited that commission, and that this is transmissible only through the line of bishops whose consecration goes back to the first bishops; that only through such bishops can the lower ministry (in the Anglican Church priests and deacons) be created; and that such bishops are the sole guardians of doctrine of Apostolic Succession, modified under its more recent name (coined, I think, in America) by the admission of Anglican scholars that "bishop" in the New Testament does not yet mean bishop in the above sense, and that gaps in the early documents make it impossible to prove continuity to the Apostles. In the Report the case is made to rest not on a probable inference from such documents as have survived, but on a theological interpretation of history, namely, that the emergence and very long persistence of the episcopal system in the historic churches must be the result of the post-apostolic guidance of these churches by the Holy Spirit—the "must" being asserted, not argued.

The question at issue, then, is not whether we should have leaders called bishops (as with the Lutherans, Moravians, and American Methodists), but whether only bishops in the long historic line have the divine warrant to constitute, by consecration and ordination, the ministry of the Holy Catholic Church, outside which no body of believers is a church in the theological sense. They are bishops, it is claimed, with an "indelible character," which even heresy or reprobate conduct cannot remove, and the priests they ordain receive a unique spiritual grace and status, one that cannot

be possessed by ministers of churches outside the historic episcopate or by any laymen whatever.

This "high" theory of *the* church is the only one that is presented by the Anglicans in the Report, with only a passing acknowledgment that not all members of the Church of England would subscribe to it. They concede that we Methodists would not be required to hold it. What they do insist on uncompromisingly is that we can have intercommunion only if, along with a *prior promise* eventually to unite, we accept their episcopal system with or without the theory, and pledge ourselves to operate it strictly: the prerogatives of bishops must be scrupulously respected, and the lesser prerogatives of priests must never be usurped by laymen.

The Anglican stipulation is inevitable. The reasons are honorable and publicly known. Three may be mentioned. The first is that the Church of England must keep in general accord with her daughter churches outside of England, and that these would be embarrassed if she relaxed the stipulation. Second, she deplures her being excluded from intercommunion with the Roman and Orthodox Churches (with which she claims to share the historic episcopate), has put out feelers toward them, and is aware that the prospect of intercommunion with them is vain if she (a) disavows officially the "high" theory of the traditional system, or (b) does so in deed by proposing to enter into communion with any church that is and wishes to remain outside the system. Third, and most acutely, requiring a rigorous adoption of the system is a condition of maintaining the Church of England's own unity, for either (a) or (b) would so scandalize her "high" section that there would be danger of a secession; the "high" can remain with the "low" only if the latter remains loyal to the system in practice.

The Methodist signatories allege what may be called empirical or pragmatic merits of the system; but that they lean also toward the theory of the system is more than suggested when they urge that the historic episcopacy is a "focus" of the "unity and continuity of the church with the apostolic faith." Anything like that theory will, I am sure, seem either just puzzling or repugnant to most of our laymen and repugnant to many of our ministers. Although the Report requires us to accept only the system, not the theory, a question of conscience arises: can we do this seeing that the theory is the only one that manages to give the system such an extraordinary rightness that, once adopted, any relaxation of it would be regarded as a grave religious scandal?

It has been argued by some Methodists that as the "low" Anglicans can take the system without the theological theory, there can be no impropriety in our doing the same. But I can see no relevant parity. (1) The "low" Anglicans are remaining within the church in which they (most of them) have been reared. While many of

them disagree with the refusal to recognize in principle and practice the nonconformist bodies as fellow churches in the full sense, they deeply hesitate to disrupt their church by quitting it by persistently breaking the rules of its time honored system. After all, in every church there are people who do not agree with all its formularies, rules and practices, but remain loyal to it out of affection and gratitude for its nourishment of their spiritual life. (2) Our position is quite different. We are being asked to *discard* the system in which we have grown up, which has been developed to suit our evangelical emphasis, and which we can adapt at need because we are legally free to do so (the Anglicans are not), and to adopt in its place what is for us an alien system. So radical a change morally requires, both in itself and as a step toward the extinction of our church, very strong reasons deeply pondered, openly examined and debated, and approved by a large majority. Six possible ones come to my mind. We must be convinced (a) that the alien system is after all the *doctrinally* right one, or (b) the best *practical* way of ordering any church, or at any rate our own; or, if neither of these, (c) that institutional unity with the *Church of England* is the best of all steps toward a wider unity, or (d) toward the evangelization of England; or (e) that the distinctive ethos and mission of Methodism as a separate body has been discharged; or finally (f) that we English Methodists are now so weak in worship, evangelical passion and moral example, or so shrinking in numbers, that our church can save itself from slow dying only by uniting its resources with another church. The last two of these reasons require one or other of the preceding ones to justify our choosing the Church of England as the one with which we should unite.

Which of these reasons (one or more) expresses the real mind of the majority of the Methodist signatories is difficult to infer from the Report, for their statements are curiously vague, and my impression is that they are studiously so. It would be a sorry union if Methodists voted themselves into the one proposed without being able to turn one of those six reasons into a conviction so deeply pondered that they would be ready to abide by all the consequences foreseeable and unforeseeable.

As for my own view about the historic episcopate, considered as something *we* ought to move into, I have to confess to being very simple-minded. That we have the guidance of the Holy Spirit as well as the Scriptures I take for granted; but the long academic discussions we had in the conversations on the relative value of tradition and Scripture bored me by their irrelevant generality, for in the first place they did not define a criterion by which we could distinguish within tradition what is due to the Spirit and what is not, and in the second place, they blurred the fact that in those conversations we were not concerned with anything so general as

tradition, but with the particular tradition of the historic episcopacy and the claim that *this* is the gift of the Spirit, so that the refusal to accept it is a sin against the Holy Ghost. What I cannot bring myself to believe is that either tradition or Scripture gives us a divine *institutional* scheme for all Christians or for all time. In this connection the supremacy of Scripture seems to me to mean that *any* institutional order, whether actual or projected, must be measured by the idea of God's nature and relation to us, and of our consequent relation to one another, that we learn from the New Testament. This is the fundamental criterion for the *Christian* sifting of tradition. As for apostolicity of institutional order, I cannot help holding that continuity through time with the Apostles is an external and unspiritual test; and as for apostolicity of doctrine, this also seems to me to depend on content and spiritual fruits as tested by the above criterion. I myself can see no connection at all between the message of the Gospels about God and man and the claim that *that* God confers the status of church only on believers organized in doctrine, order and discipline under bishops of the historic episcopate—or, indeed, under presbyters and elders, or under chairmen, circuit superintendents and their ministerial colleagues, and lay leaders. I am beginning to wonder whether there is any connection between the contemporary demythologizing of the Gospels and what looks to me like the remythologizing of the church.

The Union of the Ministries in the "Service of Reconciliation"

This service is of crucial importance, for it is not a joint public celebration of the beginning of stage one, but the *creation* of it. This stage is one of intercommunion, and the precondition of intercommunion inflexibly required by the Anglicans in the Report and accepted by the majority of the Methodists is that the ministries of the two churches shall be unified within the historic episcopate. Since there is not the slightest hint in the Report that the Methodist ministers received at the service will be required to present themselves for a further rite when full union is to take place, we are bound to assume that at that service they will become completely qualified for the ministry of the future single episcopalian church. The very point of the recurrent emphasis in the Report on the historic episcopate is that our ministers (and the services claimed to be sacramental which they conduct) cannot be recognized by the Church of England as equivalent to its own *because* they have not received ordination at the hands of a bishop in that episcopate. Not until the service of reconciliation has taken place will they be so recognized. Therefore the service must be the rite of ordination in the Anglican sense. If this conclusion is not right, the whole Report falls to pieces; for if the service is not ordination in this sense the very reason for refusing recognition and intercommunion with-

out such ordination is abnegated. Put pointedly, if the rite is not ordination, (a) we ought to have intercommunion at once and unconditionally—and on the Methodist side to bring that into effect not a jot or tittle of the constitution or of standing orders would have to be changed, and not even an empowering vote of the conference would be needed but only a vote of gratitude and delight; and (b) any negotiations for institutional union would have to begin afresh and be worked out in entirely different terms, the necessity for episcopal ordination having already been implicitly denied.

That the rite is not ordination so far as it concerns the presentation of the Anglican clergy to the presiding Methodist minister cannot possibly be suspected, for we have never in theory or practice questioned the validity, adequacy or finality (or whatever term may be preferred) of their present orders. It is the validity (or . . . or . . .) of Methodist orders only that has been in question throughout the conversations and is to remain so unless the service is held. That the service is ordination of the Methodist ministers presented to the presiding bishop is arguable from the logic of the Anglican position as set out in the preceding paragraph; also from the extreme unlikelihood that certain Methodist ministers could, as is proposed, be consecrated as bishops except on the ground that they had been duly priested in the service (there is no suggestion of a separate priesting in accordance with the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer); and further from the unlikelihood that the Church of England would recognize our ministers without episcopal ordination at a time when it is seeking from Rome and Constantinople the recognition of its own orders as unbrokenly within the historic episcopate.

So much can be said without any finical examination of the structure or text of the service as set out in the Report, and I shall not proceed to that. What does need to be looked at is the claim of some Methodist expositors that the service can be understood as primarily an extension of the area of *commission* to each other's church. The fact is that *every* Methodist minister is to be presented *individually* for the laying on of hands. So too is every Anglican clergyman (including the bishops); but from the Methodist point of view their presence, whether collective or individual, is not necessary at all for authorization to minister in our churches. Similarly for the corresponding Anglican authorization of our ministers we should think it natural and sufficient for it to be given by a general declaration of the two convocations. Since every Methodist minister *must* be presented individually, it is natural for us to presume, in the absence of an explicit assurance to the contrary, that they are presented for ordination; for authorization could be conferred *in absentia*, but ordination never.

The same questioning applies to the claim that the service is pri-

marily an exchange of gifts: this could be celebrated representatively. Exchange of gifts is an aspect emphasized in the declaration of intention prefaced to the text of the service of declaration. This, which ought to make everything clear, scrupulously avoids saying either that the service is or is not ordination: it says instead that neither church "wishes to call in question the reality and spiritual effectiveness of the ministry of the other church." This sort of phrasing, however, was used by the Anglicans years ago with the open reservation that nonconformist orders were nevertheless regarded as invalid. The use of it now to *suggest* full recognition is therefore regrettable. It is widely known among Anglicans that the service was so devised that the "high" Anglicans would be satisfied that it is the rite of episcopal ordination, at the very least "conditional" ordination (that is, for cases where there is doubt), and that the Methodists could nevertheless accept it as *not* ordination but mere extension of commission or authority. To allow this contradiction of intentions in the solemn act that is to create the unification of the two ministries is intolerable, and is recognized as such by many Anglicans as well as many Methodists. If that is to be an effective rite, it must be so *ex opere operato*, that is, in virtue of the intention of the presiding bishop and of the church he is representing, *irrespective of the intentions of the Methodist ministers on whom his hands are to be laid*.

The truth is that the conversations reached a deadlock: the Anglicans were bound by their system to require ordination, and the Methodists were bound to refuse the repudiation of the ordination they had received under their own church. The clash, instead of being publicly admitted, was blurred by a deliberate liturgical ambiguity. The plea has been made that both parties in the conversations were unsure enough on the question of orders not to wish to press their utterly opposing views, and that the devised ambiguity has to be understood as a humble committing of the whole matter to do what *He* wills. But surely the submission of *all* rites to God that He may use them as He pleases is an implicit assumption *always*. In this regard the fatal flaw in the service is that it does not confess to God and men either uncertainty or the clash of opposing certainties; nor is this in the declaration of intention.

A further point to be noted is that the service is to turn our ministers into "priests." It is uncandid to plead, as has been done on the Methodist side since the publication of the Report, that this can be read as the usual Anglican name for "minister." It is the Anglican name for one who possesses, through ordination by a bishop in the historic line, the authority of the church (a) to pronounce absolution, even general and conditional, and (b) to celebrate holy communion. That these are priestly functions (which not even a duly ordained deacon may discharge) is explicit and clear in the Anglican

sections of the Report. That no Methodist minister may discharge them in any Anglican church, and that his present and future claim to discharge them anywhere else will not be recognized, until they have taken their part in the service of reconciliation, is the steady contention of the Report. The Anglican intention is perfectly evident: our ministers are to be priests in the sense indicated by the Report and in the Anglican ordinal. The further point that the term "priest" entails or is entailed by the "high" Anglican view (the only one mentioned in the Report by the Anglicans) that holy communion is a sacrifice, I shall merely mention.

The upshot of this union of the two ministries would be that already in stage one our own ministry would be (1) theologically separated from the laity, (2) sharply divided into bishops with "indelible" grace and priests, and into (3) priests and those ministers who will have refused (as many will) to take part in the service of reconciliation and will therefore be unrecognized by the Anglicans. Further, the unification would commit us to the eventual excommunication of all churches not in the historic episcopate; and the onus of the sin of disunity is placed on *these* churches for not following our example. That is the unity that is the will of God, and that is Christian brotherhood; and with that, it is further claimed, we shall be the better able to spread the Gospel—its message of God's universal grace and its elemental life of love—to a heedless, hostile and skeptical world. To me it looks more like a venture into ecclesiastical power-politics, or an utterly desperate retreat for survival into a historic shelter.