

like them being tried as a sort of pilot scheme. There is so much good sense, careful thinking and clear presentation of facts in this report that it ought not to be ignored.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I have read with interest the animadversions of my friend Dr. Packer on my editorial in the summer issue. I did not in fact misconceive the purpose of the interim statement TOWARDS RECONCILIATION. What I strongly object to is the principle of procedure on which this as well as the 1963 report is based, namely, the acceptance of incompatible teachings and practices in the Church of England as not merely facts of reality but also valid options for which room must be found in any united church of the future. I am much concerned that evangelical spokesmen seem now to have approved this principle of procedure. I do not question the integrity of those who think in this way nor that they believe they are doing the right thing under the prevailing circumstances. But the decision to go with the current of co-existence, hoping (unrealistically, in my judgment) that all will at last end up in a harbour of united compatibility, is, I submit, a departure from the historic evangelical position. How can the doctrine of the Reformers co-exist with the doctrine of the mass and its accompaniments? This is what the co-signatories of the 1963 Dissident View had in mind when they asserted that 'most Methodists would prefer to be visibly one with the Churches of the Reformation than with medieval and unreformed Christendom' (it is a sad commentary that our Church of England is no longer regarded as a church of the Reformation!) and, further, that 'to move from a Church committed to the evangelical faith into a heterogeneous body permitting, and even encouraging, unevangelical doctrines and practices, would be a step backward which not even the desirability of closer relations could justify'. For evangelicals to go with the tide of this report and interim statement is to all intents and purposes to bid farewell to the coherent biblical faith of our Prayer Book and Articles, so long treasured and handed down to us at great cost.

I do not follow Dr. Packer's reasoning that because a statement is unsigned it precludes, apparently, the appending of a dissentient view. And, while I agree that the doctrinal statements of the report are descriptive and not prescriptive, I find it difficult to understand why Dr. Packer adds that they are not permissive. Four views of Scripture are listed, ranging from the conservative to the radical, and, after stating the hope that 'a deeper and wider agreement on the nature of Scripture and tradition' may emerge in the united Church, the qualification is added that 'there can be no question of the exclusion of the views outlined above from the life of our Churches at any stage in the present scheme'. Is not this permissive? As for 'different positions regarding ministerial priesthood', although it is well known that this

is the point of sharpest conflict between evangelicals and anglo-catholics, we are informed that 'the Commission is fully convinced that nothing in the scheme now proposed involves an adverse judgment on the theological soundness of any of these positions'. Is not this permissive? It is expected that participants in the service of reconciliation will bring to it 'diverse and opposing views' of its significance, and we are advised that 'this must be both admitted and accepted'. Is not this permissive?

This leads to the principle of ambiguity which, as part and parcel of the approved procedure, is built into the service of reconciliation. It is a case, no doubt, of the end being regarded as justifying the means; but, unless I am much mistaken, a confused means cannot be expected to lead to an orderly end, however good the intentions. Moreover, it is, I feel personally, a means which seriously compromises our evangelical principles. If persisted in, I predict that it will spell disruption for both Anglicanism and Methodism. My desire is to challenge evangelicals to reconsider their position now once again as always in the light of Scripture and the Gospel. Where would we be if the Apostles had dealt in ambiguities at Jerusalem, and the Fathers at Nicea, and the Reformers at Oxford? Not for one moment do I call in question the full dedication of Dr. Packer and others to evangelical principles, but I do think we should ask ourselves whether we took the right turning at Keele.

Yours very truly,

PHILIP E. HUGHES

Editorial Note

It is not our editorial intention to open a correspondence section, and this correspondence is now closed. We made an exception in this case because Dr. Packer was a member of the Commission whose report Dr. Hughes criticised editorially, and because the issues involved were of considerable importance to Evangelical ecumenical involvement.