Ecumenism:
A Dilemma for Evangelicals

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There can be little doubt that many evangelicals, in what Martyn Lloyd-Jones called the 'doctrinally mixed denominations', have had their loyalty severely tested by the involvement of those denominations in the ecumenical movement. I intend in this paper to explain more fully why that is so and in doing this I shall deal first with the meaning of the word 'ecumenism'; then say something about the rise of the modern ecumenical movement and its impact upon the churches; in particular, I shall refer to the methodology of ecumenism and its exemplification in the A.R.C.I.C. Statements; and finally I shall turn to the question of how we should respond to all this.

Meaning of the Word 'Ecumenism'

I begin with an account of the word 'ecumenism'. The word *oikoumene* occurs fifteen times in the New Testament. The Septuagint had used *oikoumene* quite often to translate various Hebrew words meaning world, earth or land. But in the Hellenistic world *oikoumene* was used in several other ways. It could mean the whole inhabited world, but also the civilized world, the realm of Graeco-Latin culture. And it could stand for 'empire', for as the Roman empire grew in extent, it tended to become commensurable for all practical purposes with the world.

In a number of New Testament texts the word *oikoumene* simply means 'the whole world' without any specific cultural or political connotation: e.g. Acts 17:31 and Matthew 24:14. But there are other texts where *oikoumene* is used in the sense of the one great political unit, the empire e.g., Luke 2:1 where the census mentioned is a census decreed by the Emperor, probably also Acts 17: 6; the Christians are accused of acting against the decrees of Caesar and so disturbing the *oikoumene*, that is, the empire.

The word first entered into official ecclesiastical usage when in the year 381 the Council of Constantinople spoke of the Council of Nicea as an 'ecumenical synod'. It was taken for granted that an 'ecumenical council' was convened by the emperor and met under his authority. Thus, we find the imperial significance of the word retained and applied now to the 'empire of the church'—the hybrid created by the establishment of religion under Constantine. The Church of Rome has continued to call its councils such as Trent and Vatican II 'ecumenical councils'.

The concept of the whole inhabitable world, i.e. the geographical connotation, has been uppermost in the use of the word, and it came

back into use in that sense with the meeting of the Ecumenical Missionary Conference held in New York in 1900. The word was chosen not because the conference held was to represent the whole church or every branch of it, but 'because the plan which it proposes covers the whole area of the inhabited globe'[1]. The word 'ecumenical' gradually suffered a change of emphasis as it came to be used for the representative gathering of every branch of the Christian church and efforts made to promote understanding and harmony between those branches. That is the predominant usage today. But I believe that something of the old geographical and imperial associations still cling to the word, and that behind it all is still the idea of an empire—it may be called a universal church—but it has political and imperial overtones which make me wonder about its goal and the institution that is envisaged as the realization of that goal.

The Growth of the Modern Ecumenical Movement

The beginnings of the modern ecumenical movement may be traced to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. It was missionaries who led the way. The divisions of the church at home seemed strange to them when they were transplanted to a new setting in foreign countries and foreign cultures. Delegates to the 1910 conference were limited to missions to 'non-Christian' lands. Missionaries to Roman Catholic countries were not included. This made it possible for Anglo-Catholics, who looked askance at missions by Protestants amongst Roman Catholics, to come to the conference; it also made it possible to bring together at Edinburgh a larger number of ecclesiastical and theological traditions than had been represented at any previous gathering. Largely because of this influence, emanating from Edinburgh, the ecumenical movement which was initiated there became a widely inclusive movement.

The Edinburgh Conference was, in fact, the third World Missionary Conference and it differed from the previous two in this respect, that it was more comprehensive than they had been. The earlier meetings had been made up mainly of those who came out of the Evangelical Awakening. They were emphatically Protestant and did not look with a friendly eye upon the 'Catholic' tradition. At Edinburgh, Anglo-Catholics came and took an active part. For more than half a century prior to this Anglicans had shared in international missionary conferences, but almost all of those who had done so had been Evangelicals.

The considerable hesitations of the Anglo-Catholics were overcome only by the assurance that questions of faith and order would not be brought before the conference for discussion or resolution. Their presence foreshadowed an early expansion of the ecumenical movement to take in elements that had so far not been drawn into it.

Because matters of faith and order were not allowed in the

Edinburgh Conference, and could not be discussed or resolved, the natural and inevitable development was the setting up of a body from the conference to deal with these questions. Edinburgh 1910 gave the impulse for the World Conference on Faith and Order. It was said at the Edinburgh Conference that Christians could not rest content with co-operation between separated bodies—the causes of division must themselves be examined with a view to their removal. This led to the genesis of the Faith and Order movement.

Bishop Brent of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S.A., before he left Edinburgh, told friends that he had made the resolve to call his own church to take the lead in preparing another world conference, a conference to deal with those matters of faith and order which had been excluded from the Edinburgh programme.

Edinburgh 1910 was prophetic of a new movement towards the unity of the churches. Already it was being said at the conference that they must reach out to those not present, especially the Roman Catholic Church, and to look for the day when the Church of Rome and the Greek Church would be included in such discussions. It is therefore correct to say that Edinburgh 1910 was the birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement which seeks to bridge the divide between Reformed and unReformed churches. It has been said that the impetus to ecumenism came from Protestant missionaries who were conscious of the anomaly of the historic divisions of the churches when those divisions were transported to missionary situations. However, the younger churches themselves sometimes showed the same fissiparous tendencies. It would perhaps be surprising if they did not, since it is the same weak and erring human nature, though redeemed and saved, which made up the new churches, as well as the old. In at least one area—South Africa—younger churches showed even more divisions than could be found elsewhere in the lands of the older churches. China saw a multiplication of movements and groups through the initiative of Chinese Christians, independently of co-operative agencies. Similar reports came from other lands of the younger churches. The idea that foreign countries would somehow prove to be free from divisions and would demonstrate a unity not found elsewhere was simply not realistic.

Faith and Order

Edinburgh 1910, then, gave rise to the vision of a World Faith and Order Conference. In the main the leadership came from the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. because they had the money that would make possible the promotion of the idea on a world scale. There was no doubt in the minds of those responsible from the start for the leadership of the movement that participation in the Conference by representatives of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches should be sought. It was made clear

> that all Christian Communions throughout the world which confess our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour should be asked to unite with the Protestant Episcopal Church in arranging for and conducting a conference based on a clear statement and full consideration of those things in which we differ as well as those things in which we are one.[2]

At one of the preparatory meetings a note of realism was sounded by Dean Hotovitsky of the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States. He said: 'One of your distinguished bishops today likened this Council to a sort of ecumenical council. I do not feel that it is much of an ecumenical council. The first step should be to bring the Protestant churches together; if they were able to do that, they might go on to consider how to *reconcile such differences as exist with the Eastern Orthodox Church or with the Roman Catholic Church*.'[3] But his advice was not followed. The progress towards a Faith and Order Conference was helped along by two reports on relations between the Church of England and the Free Churches called 'Towards Christian Unity' published in 1916 and 1918 and which led to the Lambeth Conference message issued in 1920 'An Appeal to All Christian People'.

Discussions had also been proceeding concerning an approach to the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Cardinal Gibbons and Cardinal Farley of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States had friends in the Episcopal Church who told them of the projected Conference and of their desire to bring into it the Church of Rome. Both promised to speak favourably at Rome about the proposed World Conference. Eventually a letter was sent to Cardinal Gasparri in Rome informing him of the Conference, which drew from him this reply (the personal pronouns for the Pope are interestingly in capital letters).

> Thanking you, that you have thought well to request the aid and support of the Roman Pontiff in expediting your worthy project, His Holiness expresses His earnest desire that the end may answer your expectation, and He asks the same of Jesus Christ with fervent prayers, all the more because, with the voice of Christ Himself sounding before and bidding Him, He knows that He Himself, as the one to whom all men have been given over to be fed, is the source and cause of the unity of the Church.[4]

Eventually, the Pope refused to accede to the request that the Roman Catholic Church should take part in the Faith and Order Conference. Rather, he hoped that '. . . if the congress is practicable, those who take part in it may, by the Grace of God, see the light and become reunited to the visible Head of the Church, by whom they will be received with open arms.'[5]

During the course of the preparations for the Conference the

Orthodox demanded, as a condition of participating, that they must be assured that all proselytizing activities amongst them by Protestant missionaries would cease, which is not an unreasonable request once you have conceded the terms of ecumenical dialogue and co-operation.

The World Faith and Order Conference met in Lausanne in August 1927. The delegates came from 108 churches: Lutheran, Reformed, Old Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist, Congregationalist, Baptist and Disciples of Christ. Some vigorously worded opinions were heard during the first meeting . . . 'We must declare our loyalty to the Nicene Creed' said one Orthodox, to which a Congregationalist replied: 'Well, I think we should clear all that old lumber out of the way.' One man came up to a member with whom he had made friends and asked: 'Can you tell me of a volume in which I could read one of those old creeds they keep talking about?' He was delighted at the immediate loan of a Prayer Book in which the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds were pointed out to him.[6]

Some present thought that the object of the Conference was to achieve a plan of unity before it dispersed. That was not the aim of the Conference, but a continuation committee was formed to carry forward the work and thought of the Conference. As replies from the churches came in, a theological committee was formed under A.C. Headlam, Bishop of Gloucester, to whom such subjects as the meaning of grace, ordination and episcopacy might be referred with a view to preparing material for a further conference. Headlam was said to be 'liable to try to fit others to his own pattern by devising formulas to which all could assent, though giving different interpretations to the words which embodied Headlam's own convictions'[7]—an essential skill, I would have thought, in any ecumenical politician or theologian. The next meeting of the Faith and Order Conference took place in Edinburgh in 1937 and that led directly to the resolution to form a World Council of Churches, which came to pass in 1948.

New Departure

There are some things which we must note in this brief review of the Ecumenical Movement to 1948. First, Edinburgh 1910 was an attempt, the first of its kind, to bridge the Protestant/Catholic divide. We have seen how there was a desire to include Anglo-Catholics and later Roman Catholics. Formerly, such gatherings had been on the basis of a common Protestant faith and doctrine.

What were the reasons for the departure from this position? One was that missionaries were encountering Anglo-Catholics in the field and the pressure was there for putting away rivalry and competition. But there was another factor at work: during the latter part of the nineteenth century there had been a growth in liberal theological teaching in the Protestant denominations which had deeply affected

attitudes towards Scripture as the seat of authority. The old Protestant certainties were being abandoned in the historic denominations, so that they became less sure and less clear about the distinctives that separated them from the Catholic tradition. I think it is important to recognise this in Edinburgh 1910 and also, that from the beginning the ecumenical movement was one which saw itself *not* in terms of bringing together primarily Protestants who shared fundamental doctrines of Scripture, but as a reaching out to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches as well.

But the question was whether this were in fact possible. It might be done where there had been erosion of Protestant doctrine and conviction by liberalism, but was it possible where authentic evangelical Protestantism remained? In a number of areas at that time, and a little later, there was a growing tension between liberalism and evangelicalism in the historic denominations which eventually led to the formation of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society, the Fellowship of Evangelical Churchmen and parallel bodies. In China in 1920 conservative evangelicals organized the Bible Union to combat the tendencies of liberalism, and four years after the formation of the ecumenical National Christian Conference in 1921 the China Inland Mission withdrew from it. This was not a passing phenomenon, the division between conservatives and liberals was to be a factor that hindered the development of ecumenism in many places.

Another thing to be noted about this early history of ecumenism is that it led to a diminishing of missionary zeal and enterprise. This was a strange paradox that had within it the seeds of a later development within ecumenism. From the early days the principle of comity had been seen as the basis for co-operation in the mission field, that is, the work of the different denominations should not compete and overlap, that limited resources should not be duplicated and areas should be allocated to different churches. But the principle had to be extended when the movement broadened to embrace unReformed churches. It might seem all very well to leave the missionary work of a particular area to another church if you felt sure that that church preached the Biblical Gospel and only differed from you in secondary matters. But it was another question if that was in doubt or if you knew for a fact that it was not the case. Yet the principle was implicit in the ecumenical movement from the beginning, as we have seen, with its desire to reach out and embrace the unReformed churches. It might seem a great leap from the principle of comity between the churches to the World Council of Churches' Conference on mission in 1973, which laid down the ecumenical understanding of mission not as converting people to Christian faith but as 'making them more essentially human', or to the recent utterance of the Archbishop of Canterbury—that 'we must . . . recognise that ultimately all religions

possess a provisional interim character as ways and signs to help us in our pilgrimage to ultimate truth and perfection.'[8] I believe, however, that a continuous line of development can be traced between them.

The emergence of the World Council of Churches in 1948 meant that the ecumenical movement had 'come of age'. From that time it was to have a growing impact upon the life of the Protestant churches. Until then it had been largely the preserve of committed ecumenists, but its influence was now to be felt more widely. It manifested itself in a rash of 'ecclesiastical joinery', of unity schemes between different Protestant churches including Anglicans. The first of these was the South India Scheme which had been initiated before the Second World War but came to fruition shortly afterwards. This was conceived to be the way forward for ecumenism and led to the development of discussions in this country between Presbyterians and Anglicans, and Methodists and Anglicans, in the 50's and 60's. But we must be clear about the basis on which these unity schemes proceeded.

Approaches to Unity

To appreciate this we need to contrast the Evangelical and the ecumenical approaches to unity. Evangelicals have conceived of unity, (though they have not been able always to realise it) primarily in terms of spiritual affinity between regenerate, believing people who accept the supreme authority of Scripture and justification by faith alone. This bond united most Protestants at the Reformation and afterwards, even across denominational boundaries. The ecumenical movement has approached the matter differently. It conceives of unity chiefly in outward institutional terms. It is based upon the belief that all who are baptized are Christians—true members of Christ's body. I quote from Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher's address in 1952 to mark the tenth anniversary of the British Council of Churches:

> Have not the Churches found in thought and practice that the unity they already have is not disembodied at all but is a unity within the Body of Christ? Are they not ready now to say that the Holy Catholic Church embraces all baptised persons and all groups of baptised persons: and that however erroneous or imperfect or even scandalous we may consider one another to be, our divisions are within the Holy Catholic Church and not across its boundaries . . .?[9]

This inclusiveness of baptism has been the underlying theme of W.C.C. thinking, but it contrasts with the classical evangelical understanding of unity.

As Carl Henry put it some time ago in *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*:

> Modern ecumenism lacks any driving commitment to evangelical theology . . . the ecumenical disposition is to regard all church members as Christian, whatever their spiritual regeneracy or unregeneracy, or their theological belief or unbelief.[10]

And he went on to say

> It is obvious that the one undeniable development of recent modern ecumenism has been the erasure first of an evangelical image and then of a Protestant image . . . With the . . . formation of the World Council of Churches and its integration of Orthodox Churches, conciliar ecumenism became neo-Protestant, and its theological mixture blurred even more the distinction between Scriptural verities and ecclesiastical tradition.[11]

Gradually structures have triumphed over truth—the primary place in ecumenical thinking has been given to the creation of organic unity at the expense of the Gospel, because each church, whether reformed or unreformed, has been accepted as it is. I shall return to this when I come to consider A.R.C.I.C., but I think the contrast between the doctrinal and institutional emphasis, which we discern in the modern ecumenical movement, can be illustrated also from history.

At the time of the Reformation, it was the possession of the Gospel which the Reformers regarded as the pre-eminent mark of the true church, not the manner of the ordering of its ministry. As Luther put it, 'The Gospel is the only succession'. Apostolic succession lies in an identity of doctrine with that of the apostles in Scripture, not in a supposed unbroken succession of ministers. Likewise, Calvin held that 'wherever we find the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there, it is not to be doubted, is a church of God'.[12]

'The Anglican Reformers', wrote Norman Sykes, 'laid great stress upon the reform of the church in order to ensure purity and soundness of doctrine, "the most precious jewel of the Gospel" as Dunham described it, which is to be redeemed (if need be) with the loss of all outward things'.

> There existed, therefore, considerable grounds for mutual co-operation and alliance between the churches of the Reformation. On the one side, such typical Anglicans as Whitgift and Hooker, whilst defending tenaciously the retention of episcopacy on the basis of history and tradition, denied that any one form of government was prescribed in Scripture in such wise as to allow of no departure from it. On the other side, Calvin himself held that 'one church should not despise another on account of a variety of external discipline'.[13]

What made all this possible was the conviction that supreme loyalty must be accorded to the Gospel—the Word of God. Before this all

other differences paled into insignificance. As time went on positions hardened and differences became accentuated. But it revealed the rationale of Protestant unity as opposed to the institutional unity of the Catholic system which rested upon outward order—upon prelacy and episcopacy, upon 'apostolic succession' in terms of persons and places and which conceived of salvation as being in communion with the See of Rome through the order and structure of the institutional church.

The paradox of the modern ecumenical movement is that while it started from the former position with the evangelical missionary conferences of the last century, it has by its attempts to bridge the divide and to include the Catholic tradition ended with the latter: Having begun in the spirit it is now made perfect in the flesh. It is now seeking to create an *oikoumene*, an empire, which is based upon acceptance of the historic episcopate and common baptism, and ultimately the primacy of the bishop of Rome. Its concern is not primarily with the Gospel—that is not its essential condition of unity—but with the historic episcopate. All the unity schemes of the 1960s were based upon this assumption, that the acceptance of the historic episcopate would be the condition of communion and agreement, but that without it there could be no unity.

It was that which was the burden of Archbishop Fisher's plea to the Free Churches in 1946 'to take episcopacy into their system'. It was that which was the crux of the Anglican-Methodist scheme of unity. In those discussions, Professor Norman Snaith said that he and his fellow-Methodists raised the issue of re-ordination, which was, of course, never explicitly mentioned in the service of reconciliation. 'We said: "If this laying on of hands is to ensure mutuality, and so forth, then why not have a service in which nobody lays hands on anybody?" This was turned down flat.'[14] If there is no laying on of hands, as was the case with the church of South India Scheme then the strictest invariability of episcopal ordination is required thereafter. That means that you only have to wait for the non-episcopally ordained ministers to die off and you have secured the essential condition of unity—universal episcopal ordination. Modern ecumenism has inverted the Scriptural and Reformation position, where unity in the truth of the Gospel was paramount, and has put in its place the Catholic principle of the paramountcy of order.

Subordination of Doctrine

The inevitable consequence of this is that doctrine plays a subordinate rôle in all unity discussions and is subservient to the purpose of creating a unity of order. Charles Davis, a Roman Catholic theologian who left the Church of Rome some years ago, in his book *A Question of Conscience* said that the structures of the Roman Catholic Church inhibited truth; that truth could not flourish in an

institution, the primary purpose of which was to protect its power and authority. Truth then becomes subservient to that end, ceases to exist in its own right, and ceases therefore to be truth. 'I find,' he said, 'the spirit that subordinates truth to authority and power throughout the ecclesiastical structure'.[15] We find a similar tendency at work in the modern ecumenical movement. In its commitment to visible, institutional unity, the truth is distorted and bent, as the rays of light are bent when they pass through a prism. Truth, in encountering and passing through the ecumenical process, is deflected and made to serve the end of promoting that outward unity which, it is taken for granted, must be the overriding consideration. It thus ceases to be truth.

The A.R.C.I.C. discussions and statements are supremely an example of this abuse of doctrine. In a letter to the *Church Times*, 28 November 1986, Bishop Moorman, who served on the A.R.C.I.C. I, stated that the purpose of the A.R.C.I.C. discussions was to 'trade off' certain 'non-essentials' on both sides against the acceptance of other 'essentials' by the parties involved. The example he gave was of Anglicans accepting the 'essential' of the papacy in exchange for the Church of Rome giving up some of its eucharistic beliefs. This was not altogether a startling disclosure. I had myself suspected that this was really the basis on which the commission proceeded—a kind of ecclesiastical horse-trading. But it was interesting to have such a frank admission from, as it were, the horse's mouth. I do not think that Bishop Moorman fully realized what he had said and the damage that he had inflicted upon the image of A.R.C.I.C.. I replied to his letter[16] and said I was interested to hear of his admission and suspected that many more would be too, especially those members of General Synod who had voted for A.R.C.I.C. in the belief that the commission was engaged in a search for truth, not in the construction of an amalgamation of beliefs from both sides, regardless of their truth. The matter rested for a few weeks until Archbishop MacAdoo, one of the joint chairmen of A.R.C.I.C. I was obliged to reply. He disowned Bishop Moorman, rather as governments disown their agents when they get into difficulties, and went on to state the basis on which the deliberations of A.R.C.I.C. have been conducted. He quoted the A.R.C.I.C. Final Report: 'Our intention has been to seek a deeper understanding of the reality of the eucharist (of ministry) which is consonant with Biblical teaching and with the traditions of our common inheritance, and to express in this document the consensus we have reached.'[17] He also quoted from the Common Declaration of March 1966 of Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI, which described the work of A.R.C.I.C. as 'a serious dialogue which, founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions, may lead to that unity in truth, for which Christ prayed.'[18] There are two things to be said about this: 1. the latter speaks of 'the

Gospels' only not the Scriptures as a whole; 2. in each case the traditions of the churches referred to are put on an equal footing with Scripture itself. This from the beginning concedes the Roman case with regard to tradition as a source of doctrine and gives it an entrenched position in the dialogue. It seems that the search cannot be for the Biblical doctrine *per se*—be it of eucharist, authority or justification, for the tradition, particularly of the Church of Rome, must be taken into account as a position which must be accommodated. This, of course, is bound to be the case. The teaching of the Church of Rome in its councils and decrees is supposed to be infallible, so the only admission the Church of Rome can make is not that its teaching on any point is wrong, but only that it has been misunderstood.

Dr. George Caird's comment on Vatican II is interesting in this respect:

> The Decree of Ecumenism of Vatican II enjoins Roman Catholics, and theologians in particular, to find ways of expressing Catholic doctrine which will avoid misunderstanding by 'separated brethren'. Throughout the whole discussion of this subject in the Council the assumption seemed to be that, if the separated brethren do not accept Catholic doctrine, it must be because they have misunderstood it. Never at any time did I hear anyone say that the separated brethren have in the past rejected Catholic doctrine precisely because they did understand it and believed it to be wrong . . .
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> . . .there are Protestants who have understood Catholicism better than most Catholics, and yet have rejected it.[19]

That position, put forward by Caird, is incomprehensible to the Catholic mind.

The purpose of ecumenical dialogue therefore is to show that on certain fundamental questions Rome's position has been misunderstood, and that really what she has been saying in the Council of Trent and elsewhere is much the same as what Scripture and the Protestant Churches have been teaching. The only trouble is that this has not formerly been recognised. This is not surmise, this is openly acknowledged by the advocates of A.R.C.I.C.. I quote from a booklet entitled *An ARCIC Catechism*:

> 'It was necessary for ARCIC to get behind the divisive words . . . then one can see that Christians (i.e. Protestants) who by tradition do not instinctively use the terminology of the . . . Catholic Council of Trent are nevertheless found to be believing and meaning what the fathers of Trent believed and meant.[20]

Certain peripheral, non-essential matters might be set aside, but the great task of A.R.C.I.C. is to rehabilitate and to merchandise the

traditional teachings of the Church of Rome for Protestant consumption, A.R.C.I.C. is just the modern packaging in which they come. So what we find consistently in the A.R.C.I.C. Statements is a supposed synthesis of Roman and Protestant teaching, but with the Roman motif dominant. This means that the clear Biblical doctrines arrived at by the Reformers are compromised and obscured and also that the traditional teachings of the Church of Rome gain a controlling position.

Acute Problem for Evangelicals

The advance of the ecumenical movement, therefore, has created an acute problem for evangelicals in the historic denominations from which the failure of many of the unity schemes of the 1960s and 70s only gave a temporary respite. The A.R.C.I.C. proposals are intended to carry things forward and to seek convergence, as are also the Lima Statements on a wider front. There has been also recently some rethinking in ecumenical circles. Unity schemes as such are no longer regarded as the way forward. The attempt to hand down a blue-print from the theologians which will finally resolve all difficulties and bring churches together at a stroke has been abandoned. In its place has been put the concept of growing into union from the grass-roots. The British Council of Churches initiated a scheme in 1985 called 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims' which was intended to develop this idea. It is being promoted in the local churches for a three year period from that date, culminating in a national conference in 1988. The project states categorically that the old idea of unity as uniformity is out. In its place is a recognition of differences, and the desire to share and benefit from the different ways of thinking and doing things in the various denominations. This is finding expressions also in the many Local Ecumenical Projects which have come into existence, and many more are planned. The Merseyside Churches Ecumenical Council is a noteworthy example. This was set up in 1985 with a covenant service held in the two cathedrals—the Roman Catholic and the Anglican. The object was to set up a permanent ecumenical structure into which all the denominations on Merseyside could be integrated. It would consist of an assembly with representatives from the various churches. Departments authorised by the assembly would carry out the work of 'joint ordination'; 'a clear ecumenical policy for pastoral appointments'; 'ecumenical in-service training'; 'a clergy orientation course' with an introduction to Merseyside for newcomers; 'an ecumenical Faith and Order Group and joint preparation for confirmation/church membership'.[21] The purpose of all this is very clear: it is so to enmesh the life of the churches in the area in the ecumenical structures that it becomes virtually impossible for ministers and people to act independently of it. New ministers coming to the area will be

expected to support the scheme or they will not really be welcome. Merseyside is intended to lead the way, and it is hoped that such local ecumenical structures will be set up throughout the country.

What underlies this ecumenical concept of unity is acceptance in an uncritical spirit by every participating church of all the others. While differences are recognised it is assumed that the differences can be accommodated and are in some way complementary and all have a contribution to make. It would be quite contrary to the spirit of this ecumenical agreement to suggest that certain tenets of liberal theology or Roman Catholic teaching have no place or should be condemned. There can be no question of the exclusion of any views represented by participating churches. We see immediately the difficulty that this presents to the evangelical, for if he enters such an arrangement he can no longer freely contend for the faith, or against error, for that would be against the whole spirit of the covenant.

Thus the pressures of ecumenism grow within the historic Protestant churches even in the absence of specific unity schemes of the sort we encountered in the 1960s. And worse, it would appear, is to come; for the A.R.C.I.C. Final Report having been approved by the General Synod, the Church of England has committed itself to take certain concrete steps towards reunion with the church of Rome. These will involve sharing of services and church buildings, joint meetings of bishops, some joint theological education, establishing of local covenants and so on. Already the Ecumenical Relations Measure and Canons, which will permit the sharing of Anglican churches by Roman Catholics (and others), has been before the General Synod and has been overwhelmingly approved. Even without the facility that that measure will offer, over 400 parish churches are used regularly for the celebration of the Roman Catholic mass.

Response

The Ecumenical temperature is steadily being raised. I suppose that like the frog in the pot, we are not expected to notice the water gradually getting hotter until it is too late. But many of us are aware of what is happening. What should our response be?

First, we have no right to stay quiet and say nothing 'Be thou not partaker of other men's sins.' Silence means co-responsibility. Evangelicals who remain silent will be every bit as much responsible for the apostasy of the Church of England, if and when it comes, as the ecumenists. As John Calvin wrote once to Margaret of Navarre: 'A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent, without giving any sound.'[22] Have we done, and are we doing, all that is in our power to expose and oppose those very teachings that are compromising the Gospel within the Church of England? Sadly, too

many are content with things as they are, as long as they are not interfered with directly in their own parish. This is a short-sighted policy: all the time the noose is tightening around them until they will find themselves in a situation where the demands of ecumenism impinge directly upon them and their parishes.

But have we now moved into a different situation in which protest has been superseded? Has not the voice of protest been small and unheeded by the majority in the Church of England? With the passing of the A.R.C.I.C. Statements and the commitment by the General Synod to reunion with Rome, have we not now reached the position which calls for separation rather than protest? This is not an easy question to answer, but I will try. It is not a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. Rather, as I see it, we are passing out of the stage where protest is relevant and appropriate and into the stage where separation will be the right response, but we have not yet reached it.

Let me remind you of these words of Bishop Ryle when he faced this question in 1890:

> One thing is very clear to my mind. We ought not lightly to forsake the Church of England. No! So long as her Articles and Formularies remain unaltered, unrepealed and unchanged, so long we ought not to forsake her . . . so long as the Articles and Formularies are not Romanized, let us stick by the ship.[23]

The situation we are in today could not have been envisaged by Ryle. He conceived of some sudden transition or change in the condition of the Church of England, in which her Articles were re-written or repealed. This the authorities have carefully avoided doing. The transition is to be gradual and each individual step towards the goal a small one. We have entered an interim phase, a transitionary period during which it is intended that the metamorphosis of the Church of England shall be brought about, in which it will shed its Protestant skin and grow a new Roman Catholic one. The A.R.C.I.C. Statements do represent an altering and Romanising of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, but the A.R.C.I.C. Statements have not yet been accepted by Parliament, the Act of Settlement has not yet been repealed, though these things are in train. So I think that this period calls for a dual reaction: it calls for continuing protest, for that period is not finally over, and it calls for preparation for separation. We must look carefully at the kind of Evangelical Protestant Church that should come into existence in England, if and when the A.R.C.I.C. proposals are implemented and the Church of England reunites with the Church of Rome. And that is the purpose of this conference and I expect of others to come, for it must be the subject of a great deal of study and prayer and consultation.

In Acts 17: 6, the Christians were accused of being disturbers of the

peace, 'These that have turned the world (oikoumene) upside down'. The Church of Rome for many centuries monopolized the word ecumenical—its ecumenical councils were meant to be a perpetuation of the old Roman empire in an ecclesiastical form. The modern ecumenical movement has in a large measure capitulated to that understanding of the Church as an outward institution, chiefly centred in episcopacy and primacy. The Gospel of grace is fatal to all such empires—to all such pretensions; and in that sense it will still be said of true believers—'these (are they) that have turned the *oikoumene* upside down'.

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NOTES

1 *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (S.P.C.K., London 1954) p.737.
2 *Ibid.* p.408.
3 *Ibid.* p.411.
4 *Ibid.* p.413.
5 *Ibid.* p.416.
6 *Ibid.* p.422.
7 *Ibid.* pp.427–8.
8 *Christianity and World Religions*, The Sir Francis Younghusband Memorial Lecture, given by Dr. Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, 28 May 1986. p.10.
9 *The Ecumenical Movement*, Norman Goodall (Oxford University Press, 1964, 2nd Edition), p.104.
10 *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*, Carl Henry (Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1987), pp.80–82.
11 *Ibid.* p.86.
12 *Institutes*, Bk.IV, cap.1, sect.IX, XII, trans. J. Allen (2 Vols. 1844).
13 *Old Priest and New Presbyter*, Norman Sykes (Cambridge University Press, 1956), p.42.
14 *Reformation Today*, K. Runia (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1968), p.84.
15 *A Question of Conscience*, Charles Davis, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1967) p.69.
16 *Church Times*, 12 December 1986.
17 *Church Times*, 9 January 1987.
18 *Ibid.*
19 *Towards Christian Unity*, Edited by Bernard Leeming S.J., (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1968), p.73.
20 *An ARCIC Catechism*, E.J. Yarnold, S.J., and Henry Chadwick, (Catholic Truth Society, 1983), p.7.
21 'Unity gathers momentum and muscle', *Evangelical Times*, March 1985.
22 Quoted in *Reformation Today*, K. Runia, p.123.
23 *Light from Old Times*, J.C. Ryle (Evangelical Press, 1980), p.53.