

Foundations

Issue No.21 Autumn 1988

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The authors' personal views are not necessarily endorsed by all the churches of the BEC.



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Foundations

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Special Issue on Ecumenism

Swanwick Appraisal

Lambeth Conference

Meaning of Ekklesia

Evangelicals at One?

The Role of Scripture

foundations

Foundations is published by the **British Evangelical Council** in May and November; its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics — and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry; its policy gives particular attention to the theology of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.

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Editorial

Ecumenism is the relevant and important subject on which this 21st issue of *Foundations* majors; the articles will be of practical help to evangelical leaders and churches.

The first article, **Not Strangers but Pilgrims**, represents one section from the booklet now available from the BEC, **HOLDING HANDS IN THE DARK**. Written by the Rev Alan Gibson, it is a competent evangelical appraisal of the Swanwick Declaration, indeed of the whole Inter-Church Process. For details of the booklet see page 2.

In the second article the editor reviews and comments upon the **Lambeth Conference** of Anglican bishops held during the summer. Our **Exegesis** article is provided by the Rev John Waite who reminds us how our views of the church need to be based upon a careful understanding of biblical terminology. Our BEC Chairman, Donovan Rowland, then reviews a recently published book, **'One in the Truth?'**. Not all will agree with the author, or even with the reviewer, but hopefully this review may stimulate us to re-examine biblically our attitudes regarding Christian unity among those who are evangelicals.

The major article, **Scripture and Tradition**, comes from the pen of our associate editor, the Rev Hywel R Jones. This is a carefully researched and well-documented piece of work in which the writer examines, both historically and theologically, the nature and status of the Bible in ecumenism. The value of the article is further enhanced by the fact that, to my knowledge, there is no other serious evangelical research available in print on this vital subject. Readers may like to know that this article is the first section of a book Hywel Jones has written on ecumenism. It will be published in the Spring of 1989 by the Evangelical Press of Wales under the title, **ONE GOSPEL, ONE CHURCH**. Further details will be available from the BEC office or from the publisher.

There is plenty of food for thought for you in this issue and if you find the journal helpful we would appreciate your help in recommending it to other churches and Christians.

One word of apology before I close this Editorial. In my review of *The New Dictionary of Theology* (IVP) in the last issue I incorrectly stated that Murray Harris' article advocated Conditional Immortality. I am still baffled about how I came to make this statement, especially as I had earlier read and appreciated Harris' valuable work, *Raised Immortal*, and knew he did not espouse Conditional Immortality. I apologise unreservedly to IVP and to Murray Harris for this error and also for unfairly charging the NDT with advocating this view.

Readers will notice that the page width of Foundations has been slightly narrowed with this issue. This has been done by reducing the margin, not the amount of copy printed and was necessary to ensure that the journal does not exceed the first price band for postal purposes.

Not Strangers but Pilgrims

Alan Gibson

*A more ambitious ecumenical scheme has never been seen in Great Britain than the Swanwick Inter-Church Process. The BRITISH EVANGELICAL COUNCIL is so concerned about the implications it has for evangelicals that they have published a booklet entitled **HOLDING HANDS IN THE DARK** showing the background to the Process, analysing its essential nature and discussing its probable outcome. It is no exaggeration to say that it is required reading for leaders of those evangelical churches whose denominations are part of the Process. It will also be valuable to independent churches in showing their members why they believe they must stand aside from this latest ecumenical disaster.*

We publish here the substance of the last section of the booklet, indicating the likely consequences we expect if the Swanwick proposals are implemented. The booklet costs 75 pence post free and can be obtained from the BEC office.

Thirty-two candles were lit and placed in a tray of earth. They burned side by side in St Peter's Church, Eaton Square in London on the evening of the 8th November 1985 symbolising the undertaking given by thirty-two churches to work side by side in prayer, study and discussion in the new initiative of the Inter-Church Process. In September 1987 the Process held a Conference at Swanwick and those participating issued a significant Declaration. They also laid out the ground plans for sweeping changes in the pattern of ecumenical relationships in Great Britain. It is clear that **these will affect every church in the land** and the whole climate of Christian life will be involved.

We recognise that some modifications may well be made to the present proposals before their implementation in September 1990. It is **now**, however, that the discussion is taking place and churches must consider, among other factors, the effects Swanwick is likely to have. These are the consequences we foresee:

1. Unity will be given precedence over truth

Although lip-service is given to the place of Scripture, the principle of *unity in truth* is being displaced by *unity before truth*. This is a reversal of the Biblical order. "The oft-quoted prayer of our Lord, 'that they all may be one' (John 17:21), is preceded by the equally important proviso: 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth' (John 17:17). Truth is not a goal to be reached. It is a ground on which to stand from the outset" (Dr A Skevington Wood, EV, vol 11, no 2, p 17). By the way in which some seem to view the Swanwick Process its effect will amount to *unity instead of truth*. The principle of Liberation Theology, that truth is discovered through action, leads to *new*

truth for today which is at loggerheads with the truth of yesterday. Without doubt, ecumenicalism is the new orthodoxy and the new heretics are those who do not espouse it.

2. Absolutism in doctrine will be further eroded

The late Francis Schaeffer amply demonstrated the growth of relativism in philosophical thought in the twentieth century and how it has made massive inroads into theology. Ecumenical thinking is a product of this trend and every new scheme re-inforces it. An American liberal, Bishop J S Spong of Newark, has written:

“If Christian unity is to be achieved, Christian pluralism will have to be affirmed and the relativity of all Christian truth will have to be established. This reality makes us aware that every narrow definition of Christian doctrinal certainty will finally have to be abandoned; every claim by any branch of the Christian church to be the true church or the only church will ultimately have to be sacrificed; every doctrine of infallibility — whether of the papacy, or of the Scriptures, or of any sacred tradition, or of any individual experience — will inevitably have to be forgotten” (Christian Century, June 8-15, 1983).

Paul Schrottenboer quoted Spong in order to warn evangelicals against advocating that sort of dialogue and entering the forum where it takes place (ERT, vol 12, no 3, p 216).

3. Acceptance of the Roman Catholic Church will grow

With some misgivings the RC hierarchy sees Swanwick as the next step in their seeking acceptance and, some would say, ultimate supremacy in the religious life of this nation. They would not do so unless they believed they could influence the Proposals to further their own goals. Any reluctance, however, is all on the RC side; no hesitation is expressed among the other Swanwick participants. Now there is a level at which all Christians are to “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom 15:7). To accept a converted Roman Catholic as a brother in Christ before he sees that he must leave the religious system in which he was brought up is a duty (Acts 18:26). But to accept the Roman Catholic Church with its unreformed doctrines of the Mass, its Mariolatry and its complex of indulgences, penances and purgatory is something else. To accept such a Church as a valid Christian church with which we could even contemplate co-operation and unity in mission is an insult to the glory of the Head of the Church. And yet that is precisely what evangelical churches are being asked to do as a pre-condition of taking part in the Swanwick Process.

4. The gap between national and local ecumenism will widen

As we have seen, there is a deliberate shift towards local activities. This is to opt for the sprinters rather than those at the back of the field. It is in line with the contemporary view that we *do theology* at the coal face rather than *write theology* in the academic study. “Lent ’86 was an attempt to listen to what the

Holy Spirit was saying to and through the churches and that is a theological statement. The responses from those who participated are also theological statements" (VIEWS p 58). This can amount to a further challenge to the principle of authority in the church and that would not be an unmixed blessing. Where there is a wide gap between what ought to be and what is then the authority of the gospel itself is in danger of being discredited. How will the world take seriously a church which does not take itself seriously?

5. Pressure to involve local churches will increase

The pressure is already there. For churches in denominational structures their representatives may make the decision for them and the local congregations will be expected to fall into line. There were also people at Swanwick from groups which have no authority over their associated congregations. (This has led to some misunderstanding, for example, over the commitment of the Christian Brethren to the Process. The submission in their name has the authority only of the man who wrote it, as his own reference to "unfederated autonomous local congregations" indicates! REFLECTIONS, p 18-21). Such local churches will now receive invitations to meet representatives of other Christian groups in their locality to discuss a wide variety of activities which, the Press will be told, "all the churches support". This would be serious enough if it led to churches going against their better judgment merely because of peer group pressure. What is even more serious is that the Bible views false teaching about the gospel not merely as unfortunate but as satanic (Mt 16:23; 2 Cor 11:13-14; Rev 2:24 etc). The choice between condoning such spurious gospels and opposing them for Christ's sake will become even more painful as grass-roots ecumenicalism takes a firmer hold.

6. Evangelical relationships will be strained even further

Every man must do what his own conscience dictates. Evangelical Christians and evangelical churches are not all agreed about ecumenicity and there are strong advocates of Swanwick who are evangelicals. If we were to accept that the unity of all evangelicals need only be expressed at para-church level in conventions and co-operative evangelism the strain would not be so great. There are those, however, who believe that evangelical churches *as churches* should be witnessing to the unity of the genuine body of Christ for the gospel's sake. The burden of the late Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his 1966 address to the National Evangelical Assembly was not the issue of the church but the issue of the gospel. How can we convince the unbeliever that **the doctrine which most matters to us is the gospel** if our churches are more closely linked with those who deny it than with those who affirm it? In an irenic and constructive book a Baptist minister has recently expressed his disquiet over the strains he feels at this level.

"The seeking after visible unity with the church of Rome with which some Anglican Evangelicals are engaged seems to us to be either a dangerous pipe-dream or a denial of the truth. But while this apparently vain search goes on, that cross-fertilisation between biblical Christians in the established church and the free churches has been hindered and is *in*

danger of lasting damage” (AMESS, p 98, our italics).

The further the Swanwick pilgrimage proceeds the greater that danger will be.

7. Millions of strangers to God will be deluded that they are pilgrims

This is **the most serious objection of all** to the Inter-Church Process entitled “Not Strangers but Pilgrims”. To encourage someone to believe that they are a pilgrim bound for heaven whilst they remain a stranger to God and his saving grace is a fearful responsibility. Not only the title but the whole ethos of the Process is indiscriminate and presumptuous. This is not only unwise, it furthers the most fatal of delusions. John Bunyan anticipated this scenario in the closing paragraph of **PILGRIM’S PROGRESS**. Vain-hope, the ferry man, helps Ignorant across the river only to see him bound hand and foot and consigned to outer darkness. Bunyan’s comment must serve as a grave warning to all who offer false encouragement to any church-goers in our nation who remain unconverted, “Then I saw there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven as well as from the City of Destruction.”

Conclusion

We make no apology for the fact that our appraisal of the Swanwick Process amounts to a critique. We cannot in all conscience commend what is built upon such unsound foundations. Our conclusion, however, is not negative.

Swanwick should be a stimulus to those evangelicals who are better grounded to raise a better house. There is such a thing as genuine evangelical ecumenicity. To question Swanwick is not to affirm isolationism. The Bible does envisage a visible expression of unity between gospel churches. As the people of God grow in holiness they will grow in love for one another and manifest that love in meaningful, relevant care for one another. It is a spiritual work, not achieved by church politics or carnal methods. The Holy Spirit does, however, use means to achieve his purposes. **The British Evangelical Council** is a body seeking to express and further this positive goal of evangelical church unity. If there was need for its testimony when it was founded over thirty-five years ago, then Britain after Swanwick is going to need it even more.

Alan F Gibson BD is the BEC General Secretary and author of HOLDING HANDS IN THE DARK

References

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| EV | — | EVANGELICAL VOICE, journal of the Campaign for Concerted Witness to Reformed Truth, Presbyterian Church of Ireland |
| ERT | — | EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY
Paternoster Press for World Evangelical Fellowship |
| VIEWS | — | VIEWS FROM THE PEWS, Lent '86 and local ecumenism, 1986 |
| REFLECTIONS | — | REFLECTIONS, How churches view their life and mission, 1986 (both published jointly by British Council of Churches and Catholic Truth Society) |
| AMESS | — | ONE IN THE TRUTH?, Robert Amess, 1988, Kingsway |
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The Lambeth Conference

The Editor

From 18 July until 7 August 1988 some 525 bishops of the Anglican Communion, representing 70 million communicants worldwide, met for the Lambeth Conference on the University of Kent campus at Canterbury. Held every ten years, the Lambeth Conference provides Anglican leaders with the opportunity of discussing together their mutual problems and concerns. These conferences are, therefore, important milestones for Anglicanism and, more recently, for inter-church relationships. The 1988 conference was no exception and extensive publicity was given to it by the media.

There was, of course, one dominant issue, namely the **ordination of women** both to the priesthood and to the episcopate. Delegates were divided over the issue and the Conference appeared to be facing a major crisis which threatened the gradual fragmentation of Anglicanism. Prior to, and during the Conference, signals were being given from all directions. For example, the Orthodox archbishop, John Zizionlas, warned the bishops that a decision by Anglicans to ordain women might seriously impede the search for world church unity. He urged there should be an exhaustive theological debate before a final decision was taken. The Bishop of London, Dr Graham Leonard, spoke strongly against the ordination of women. 'We are trying to stick together', he said, 'but you don't preserve unity by agreeing with what you believe to be contrary to the Gospels'. Dr Leonard suggested that men training for the ministry would need to be sent to separate seminaries. On the other hand, the primates of New Zealand and Canada revealed that they were ready to move forward and ordain women bishops.

The crisis has been temporarily averted by allowing individual provinces to proceed in the matter as they think appropriate while 'maintaining the highest possible degree of communion with the provinces which differ'. The resolution called on Dr Runcie, in consultation with other primates, to appoint a commission to examine relationships between provinces and to consult with other churches. Reporting the decision of the Conference, THE TIMES correspondents were fair and accurate in introducing their articles with the headlines: 'Lambeth Conference votes for compromise as means of preserving Anglican Church unity' and 'Middle path is chosen on women bishops' (2 August 1988). Yes, it was a classical Anglican compromise designed to hold diverse, contradictory views and traditions within one church. Scriptures were used and misused in debating the issue. The Archbishop of Sydney, speaking on behalf of 40 other bishops, considered it wrong to depart from the Scriptures, which had been endorsed by the unvarying tradition of the church. Opponents of the ordination of women obtained some support from the more evangelical bishops of Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria.

In this and other debates, we learned that a new but key word is **reception**, which many bishops are using as a solution to the problem of the ordination of

women. Reception, in this context, means that the final proof of the truth of a new idea in the church is the general consent of all the faithful which is only obtained slowly and patiently. Clifford Longley understands it to be 'a way of explaining a patchy pattern of belief over something important. A church still in the process of receiving something need not think of itself as disunited and, therefore, need not split up into rival factions' (THE TIMES, 21 July 1988).

Other issues, of course, were considered and debated at the Lambeth Conference but there were two earlier addresses which were particularly significant. One was the address by Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Roman Catholic professor of theology who is, in the words of Dr Runcie, 'one of the founding fathers of the theology of liberation'. His radical theology dominated by Marxist philosophy was warmly received by the bishops. A second address was by Dr Runcie early in the Conference and was entitled, 'The Nature of the Unity we Seek.'

Described as a 'keynote address', in it Dr Runcie was primarily concerned with the need for increasing unity within the Anglican communion, especially in view of controversial issues like the ordination of women. He claimed that unfettered provincial autonomy had led Anglicans into great difficulties. His answer was that there needed to be a strengthening of the central organs of the Anglican communion (including the status and authority of the Lambeth Conference). Runcie did not stop there. Clearly feeling the need for the primacy of one bishop above others, he urged Anglicans through ARCIC to consider positively 'the question of an **episcopal primacy** in the Universal Church...ARCIC...is not proposing restoration but a reform of primacy as a ministry of unity'. The Archbishop of Canterbury referred to a meeting he had with the Pope and other Christian leaders as well as representatives of all the major world religions at Assisi in October 1986: 'At Assisi I saw the vision of a new style of Petrine ministry — an ARCIC primacy rather than a papal monarchy. The Pope welcomed us but then he became in his own words "a brother among brothers"'. And at the end we all bundled into the same bus and the Pope had to look for a seat!

How tragic! How sad! Dr Runcie, with others, is pushing Anglicanism strongly in the direction of Rome but hardly anyone at Lambeth spoke out for the supremacy of Scripture and for those biblical doctrines which our Protestant forefathers prized and even died for. Now I can more readily appreciate the anguish and conflict which some evangelical Anglican ministers feel as they see the church they love move further and further from the Word of God. Our prayers should include such brethren in this difficult situation.

Hot from the press is a book generated by the 1988 Lambeth Conference, **The Study of Anglicanism**, edited by Stephen Sykes and John Booty (SPCK, £17.50). It is a unique work of scholarship and is going to be a standard reference work. Thirty-one contributors from an internationally renowned group of authors represent every strand of contemporary Anglicanism. For those eager to understand the history and theology of Anglicanism, it is compulsory reading.

Exegesis 7: The Church and the Churches

John Waite

This exegetical work was first prepared for a BEC Study Conference in 1979 as one of a pair of addresses taking alternative evangelical views of a matter on which the churches in the BEC are not unanimous. It is included here as a reminder that beneath our intensely practical differences lie issues of the understanding and interpretation of Scripture. More work of this kind is essential if genuine evangelical ecumenism is to make progress among us.

There is perhaps no branch of theology in which we show greater reluctance to systematize Scriptural teaching than Ecclesiology. We endeavour to be scrupulously exact in collating the Biblical data, for example, on the Doctrine of God, the Doctrine of Man, the Doctrine of the Work of Christ or the Doctrine of Scripture. But the Doctrine of the Church, though clearly set forth in Scripture, even on the matters of organisation and administration, is curiously side-stepped by many. These come to the Scriptures with minds steeped in traditional conceptions and by skilful casuistry and an immoderate use of special pleading, claim to be able to find Scripture support for their particular view of the Church.

The question that has to be determined is whether the form of Church organisation is definitely prescribed in the New Testament or not. Is it a matter of expediency — each body of believers being permitted to adopt and devise that method of organisation best suited to its own circumstances and condition? Or do the Scriptures themselves prescribe the divinely-conceived pattern?

The aspect of the Doctrine of the Church which is our particular concern in this study is the relationship between the Invisible Church¹ and its visible and temporal expression. It is our endeavour to establish the meanings which attach to the term “church” in the Scriptures. It will be necessary briefly to examine the meaning of the term *ekklesia*, to survey the antecedents of its use by the New Testament writers and to evaluate its significance in the light of certain crucial passages in the New Testament itself.

The meaning of the word *ekklesia*

It used to be fashionable to lay stress upon the etymology of the Greek word *ekklesia* — *ek*, “out” and *kalein*, “to call”. The term *ekklesia* was then held to imply that the Church was constituted of those who have been called out from the world, having been chosen, elected by God. Such a view would claim

support from such New Testament passages as 1 Peter 2:9. It is generally agreed, however, that etymological considerations alone cannot determine the precise significance of the term *ekklesia*. In the everyday Greek of New Testament times, the word *ekklesia* was more or less a technical term to denote a body of free citizens who were regularly summoned to conduct the affairs of their city. This technical use of the term is to be found in the New Testament in Acts 19:39 where the Ephesian town clerk rebuked the citizens of Ephesus for their unruly and unseemly behaviour reminding them that the matter in dispute could either be settled in the law courts or in the regular assembly, *ekklesia*. In the same passage the word is used with a non-technical connotation implying simply an assembly or gathering of people — “the assembly was confused” v32, “he dismissed the assembly” v41.

According to its common usage the word lays emphasis not so much on the fact of being called out as on the fact of assembly. The *ekklesia* was first and foremost a gathering — the stress is on “togetherness”.

The use of the word *ekklesia* by the translators of the Septuagint

In endeavouring to discover the significance of the word *ekklesia* for the writers of the New Testament it is important not to overlook the fact that they were familiar with and used extensively the Greek Translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). They were familiar already with the word *ekklesia* apart from its secular-political use. Undoubtedly their employment of this word was coloured by its previous use by the Septuagint translators. It will, therefore, not be out of place to consider how the term was used in the Old Testament.

Two terms are used in the Hebrew Old Testament to denote “assembly” or “congregation” viz *EDAH* and *QAHAL*. The latter is more widely used. It was this latter term that the Greek translators represented by *ekklesia*. It is to be found in Deuteronomy and throughout the Old Testament Historical Books. An examination of these passages shows that *ekklesia* standing for the Hebrew *QAHAL* is used of the congregation of Israel, especially when gathered for religious purposes (eg Deut 31:30; Jdg 20:2; 1 Sam 17:47; 1 Kgs 8:14). The following references in the Psalms also confirm that the primary thought is of God’s people assembled for worship — Psalms 22:22,25; 35:18; 40:9,10; 89:5; 107:32; 149:1. The meaning of *ekklesia* in the Old Testament is essentially an “assembly” — the stress is upon gathering together, meeting in a certain locality. When Stephen was arraigned before the Sanhedrin, he referred in his defence to Moses as “he that was in the *ekklesia* in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38).

The Old Testament Church was co-extensive with the nation. Whilst in the wilderness Israel could assemble and did assemble as one vast congregation, during her later history the word *ekklesia* is primarily reserved for those occasions when Israel was assembled for a religious purpose, but even when not so assembled, Israel had ideally only one centre of worship, though distributed in its tribes throughout Palestine. Israel as the Old Testament Church was conceived of as one congregation essentially.

An examination of New Testament passages where the word *ekklesia* occurs

Quite clearly it is possible to make direct reference to only a representative selection of passages in an attempt to establish the significance of *ekklesia* in the New Testament. I am able to assure you that as far as I am aware every single passage has been examined and my selection is designed to be truly representative.

Three uses of the term *ekklesia* may be recognised in the New Testament:

- a) It is applied to the local church assembled
- b) It frequently denotes groups of believers living in one locality comprising one congregation
- c) It stands for the Church universal — the transcendental reality of which the local church is the temporal and visible expression

a) The local church assembled

The first occurrence of *ekklesia* in this sense is in the Gospels — in Mt 18:17. The Lord Jesus Christ is here dealing with the exercise of church discipline. An erring brother who fails to respond to the admonition of the individual against whom he has committed an offence and likewise remains recalcitrant when confronted by a small coterie of believers, is to be arraigned before the church. Without question the reference is to the local church assembled.

This meaning of *ekklesia* is to be found also in 1 Cor 11:18, “when ye come together in church”. Later in this same letter in Chapter 14 there is a number of such allusions. The entire chapter is taken up with the theme of orderliness in public worship. The local church assembled is plainly implied here (cf verses 4, 19, 28, 35). Both in Acts 11:26, referring to the church at Antioch (“They assembled themselves with the church”), and in Acts 15:4 and 22, referring to the Jerusalem church, the most natural sense of the context establishes the use of *ekklesia* in the meaning of the local church assembled.

b) A group of believers living in one locality and comprising one congregation

There are numerous passages belonging to this category. Acts 5:11 speaks of the solemnizing effect that the stern judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira had on the entire church in Jerusalem. “All the church” here surely means all the believers living in Jerusalem and its environs who met together for worship as one congregation. The same holds good for Acts 8:1 “the church which was at Jerusalem”. In 1 Cor 4:17 (cf 1 Cor 7:17) the Apostle Paul commends Timothy to the Corinthians as his representative to bring them into line with the other churches which he had founded under God in matters of doctrine and conduct. It is particularly noteworthy here that Paul does not say “as I teach everywhere in the whole church”, but “as I teach everywhere in every church”, as if to point to the independence of each local congregation. This sense is further corroborated by such passages as Galatians 1:2, 1 Thess 2:14 (cf Gal 1:22). Both Judaea and Galatia were relatively small geographical areas, but there is no suggestion here of the local congregations forming part of a larger entity. Paul does not speak of “the church in Galatia”, of “the church in Judaea”. The plural *ekklesia* here must be carefully noted (cf Acts

15:41 and 16:5). In his Roman letter (Rom 16:6, cf Rom 16:4) the Apostle extends greetings to the believers in Rome from “all the churches” (RV “All the churches of Christ salute you” — not “the whole church of Christ...” Individual churches are frequently specified, for example, “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2) and “the church which is at Cenchraea” (Rom 16:1). The suggestive phrase “church of God” we will refer to again later.

c) The Church Universal — The transcendental reality of which the *local church* is the temporal and visible expression

The first occurrence of the term *ekklesia* in this sense is in the Gospels. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus Christ declares to Peter and the other Apostles that He will build His Church upon the rock of the truth of Peter’s confession, “upon this rock I will build my church”. The Church here referred to is not just the visible church but the Universal Church,² comprising that vast company of the saints whom no man can number “who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:9-17). Indeed the Universal Church is made up of all those who have ever, or will ever, make the confession “thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”. This is the supra-temporal, the transcendental Church.

Other passages which seem to bear this significance are Eph 1:22, “and hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church which is his body, the fulness of him which filleth all in all” (cf Col 1:18). Again in Ephesians 3:10, “to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God”. With these statements we may also compare Ephesians 5:23 “Christ is the head of the church”, v25 “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it”, and Heb 12:22,23 “the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven”.

The relationship between the Church Universal and the local church

a) How does the New Testament define the relationship between the Church Universal and the local church? Although the term *ekklesia* is used of many local congregations, the New Testament writers acknowledge but *one* Church. Yet it must be emphasized that the one *ekklesia* is not the aggregate of many local *ekklesia*. It is noteworthy that the expressions used in description of the invisible and transcendent Church are also applied to the local assembly. A number of examples to illustrate this may be cited.

b) Writing to the Ephesian Christians, the Apostle Paul declares, “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph 5:25). Here the context makes it abundantly plain that Paul is referring to the Church Universal. The same Apostle, however, delivering his farewell address to the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus exhorts them “to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). The transcendental Church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:23), yet Paul is able to say to the Corinthian believers, “Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27).

The wording here should be noted carefully. Paul does not say as we might have expected, “ye are members of the body of Christ”, but “ye *are* the body of Christ”.

c) Further, the application of the phrase “church of God” to both the local church and to the transcendental Church demands careful consideration. When Paul expostulates with the Corinthians about their unseemly behaviour in their participation in the Lord’s Supper, he says “despise ye *the church of God*?” (1 Cor 11:22). Similarly in the matter of their eating food that had been first presented to the gods in a pagan temple, he commands “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles nor to *the church of God*” (1 Cor 10:32). The plural of this remarkable expression occurs in 1 Cor 11:16. Timothy is reminded that “the house of God” in which he holds office is “the church of the living God” (1 Tim 3:15). In the same way those who are appointed to hold office as overseers (bishops) must have their own households under effective disciplinary control otherwise how can such “take care of the church of God” (1 Tim 3:5).

d) The evidence presented here seems capable of only one interpretation. The invisible Church or the Church Universal takes local and temporal form in the individual assembly. The transcendental Church is concretely exhibited in the local church. Each local congregation is a kind of microcosm of the whole Church. Is not this the most natural meaning-of such an expression as “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2)? It would seem that the apostle addresses the assembly at Corinth as the local and temporal expression of the Church of God — the Church Universal. Each local church has a certain completeness in itself; it is able to and should function as the body of Christ.³

An examination of the view that the New Testament uses the word in a third sense as a collective term

There are many who maintain that the New Testament writers make use of the word *ekklesia* in another sense besides the two meanings we have already considered. It is suggested that support can be found in the New Testament for the view that *ekklesia* denotes the whole body of those who have confessed their faith in Christ throughout the world and who are organized for worship. The following passages are usually adduced to demonstrate this use of the term *ekklesia*.

a) In the great passage on the gifts of the Spirit, Paul declares to the Corinthians, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets...” (1 Cor 12:28). Is the Apostle using the word church here in a sense other than the two meanings which we have already established? Are we to understand that the reference is to the visible church as it existed at the time throughout the world? It may be argued that mention of offices and functions confines the statement to the visible church as that church alone is organized and subject to administration. At the same time such a passage as Ephesians 2:19-22 which plainly refers to the transcendental Church still recognizes the special place that certain individuals hold in relation to this mighty spiritual edifice. The use of *ekklesia* in 1 Cor 12:28 cannot therefore be cited as

unquestionably pointing to a third dimension in the meaning of the term. The context does not *require* us to interpret *ekklesia* as implying the visible Church throughout the world.⁴ We need more conclusive evidence before we can claim that this third meaning for the term *ekklesia* has New Testament warrant. Similarly, the striking phrase, “the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16 though regarded by many as pointing to the visible Church in the world organized for worship, is more appropriately construed as an epithet for the supra-temporal Church.⁵

b) One passage *alone* on the surface appears to offer an exception to the otherwise consistent use of the term *ekklesia* in the New Testament to denote either the local assembly or the Church Universal. The crucial statement to which we refer is in Acts 9:31. The text of the Authorised Version reads, “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied”. This use of the plural *ekklesiai* accords with New Testament usage and raises no problem. It has long been recognized, however, that the Authorised Version at this point lacks the support of what are held to be the best and most reliable Greek manuscripts. Probably the Revised Version substitution of the singular “church” for the plural “churches” is to be acknowledged as the correct reading. How are we to explain this solitary exception of the use of *ekklesia* in the singular to denote a group of churches located in various places throughout Judaea, Galilee and Samaria?

The first point that must be made is that this is the only passage where the word *ekklesia* is employed in the singular to designate a number of local Christian assemblies. We must, therefore, look for some explanation which will justify this use of the singular without conflicting with its universal import outside this passage. We must not omit to take note of the fact that the Apostle Paul twice uses the plural “churches” when referring to this same group of local assemblies. He tells the Galatian Christians that he was “unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ” (Gal 1:22). The Thessalonian believers are reminded for their encouragement that in their experience of persecution following their reception of the Word of God they “became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 2:14).

There are two ways of explaining this exceptional use of the singular *ekklesia* in this passage:

(i) The many separate assemblies here designated by the singular *ekklesia* had in fact been *one church* originally. As a direct result of the persecution that was mounted against the Jerusalem church following the death of Stephen, the Jewish believers “were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1). The “church” referred to in Acts 9:31 was in fact the original Jerusalem church now driven by persecution to occupy different localities throughout Palestine. The singular “church” then can be explained as due to this exceptional circumstance. These separate

congregations had formerly assembled together. There are those who raise doubts as to whether the Jerusalem church being so numerous could have constituted one congregation. John Owen aptly comments, "It is of no force which is objected from the multitude of them that were said to believe, and so, consequently, were of that church, so as that they could not assemble together, for whereas the Scripture says expressly that the 'multitude' of the church did 'come together', it is scarce fair for us to say they were such a multitude as that they could not come together" (Works vol xv — An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order and Communion of Evangelical Churches).

(ii) Supplementing this attractive explanation mention may be made of the suggestion of Dr F J A Hort that the scattered Jerusalem church occupied the territory of "the ancient Ecclesia which had its home in the whole land of Israel" (The Christian Ecclesia, p 46). Either way a unique situation obtained which made the use of the singular *ekklesia* appropriate without violating its essential meaning of "an assembly".

A consideration of evidence that seems to go against the autonomy of the local congregation

It may still be mooted, however, whether the New Testament invariably acknowledges the complete autonomy of the local church. What conclusions are we to reach, for example, regarding the Council of Jerusalem? Does not the Jerusalem church here claim jurisdiction over the churches of Syria and Asia Minor? A careful study of the account of the Council in Acts 15 enables the following points to be established.

a) The important discussion concerning the relationship of the Gentile converts to the ceremonial ordinances of the Jewish law did not arise on the initiative of the church at Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem did not convene the so-called Council. The circumstances which gave rise to the Council were as follows: Certain Jewish Christians from Jerusalem (or Jews who had espoused much of the Christian Gospel) visited the church at Antioch and stressed that for Gentiles as well as for Jews circumcision was a *sine qua non* of their enjoyment of the full benefits of salvation. Paul and Barnabas strenuously resisted their teaching with the result that the church at Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas and other representatives of the Antiochean church to take the matter up with the apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem. The initiative belonged to the church at Antioch which voluntarily instituted this momentous debate.

b) In the deliberations of the Council, James acts as the chairman and sums up after first Peter and then Paul and Barnabas have presented their conclusive evidence that believing Gentiles were treated by God as on an equal footing with believing Jews. His proposal concerning the letter that should be sent to the Gentile churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia was agreed by the whole church as well as the apostles and elders. Paul and Barnabas and the other representatives from Antioch were clearly well satisfied with the outcome of the discussion though the letter that they took with them was written in the name of the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church. The stipulations

made in the letter to the Gentile Christians are called "decrees" (*ta dogmata*) in Acts 16:4 and are stated to have been "ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem". This might appear to indicate that the Jerusalem church had a jurisdiction over these other churches. It must be borne in mind, however, that the church at Jerusalem was the mother church and was still directed in its affairs by the apostles and thus possessed a unique authority. Further, it was entirely composed of Jews and needed in the crisis that had arisen to declare unequivocally that Gentile believers were in no way inferior to Jewish believers. The decisions of the Council were of a binding nature not because they came from the Jerusalem church, but because they had been formulated by the apostles under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28).

It should be noted also that the particular matter raised at this Council was *sui generis* and no other examples of this kind of special direction to local churches is to be found in the New Testament. Insofar as the Council of Jerusalem has any bearing upon the relationship that should exist between local congregations, it may be said to provide a precedent for mutual consultation on matters of common concern. But here is to be found no warrant for setting up central bodies that have jurisdiction over the affairs of local congregations. If we claim to derive our authority from the New Testament for the organization and administration of the churches, it has to be acknowledged that no support can be found for organization of local assemblies within denominations. Such conceptions as lie behind the phrases "the Baptist Church", "the Congregational Church", "the Anglican Church", are quite foreign to the teaching of the New Testament whether implicit or explicit.

The autonomy of local churches in New Testament times was in measure curtailed by the authority of the apostles. The Pauline letters as well as those of Peter, James and John contain *commands* as well as counsels and exhortations. The apostles claim by virtue of their office to have jurisdiction over the local assemblies of believers. The Apostolate, however, was a once-for-all phenomenon in the Christian Church (cf Eph 2:19,20) and can provide no precedent for the infringement of the autonomy of local congregations in post-apostolic times.

Different perhaps is the office or function of evangelist. Men such as Philip (Acts 21:8,9), Timothy (2 Tim 4:5), Titus and perhaps John Mark belonged to this class. Some of the duties that went with the work of an evangelist may be gathered from the instructions given by Paul to Timothy and Titus. Their work was to preach, to baptize and also to govern the affairs of the churches under their jurisdiction. To them was committed the responsibility of ordaining elders in the local assemblies (Tit 1:5; 1 Tim 5:22). They were also responsible for the exercise of discipline (Tit 3:10). Their authority seems to have been more general than that of the officers of the local congregations and somewhat superior. Possibly they should be regarded rather as those who were representatives of an absent authority (ie that of the Apostle Paul) rather than as possessing inherent authority. While this would apply to Timothy and Titus, it does not hold good for Philip. But then we have no evidence that

Philip acted as an evangelist in the same way as Paul's two protégés. It must therefore be left an open question as to whether there is a permanent place in the life of the churches for men of exceptional spiritual insight and wisdom who may fill the role of evangelist in the New Testament sense of that term. That certain individuals possess the gift for such a function (the word is chosen advisedly rather than "office") seems undeniable. If the gift is bestowed, then should it not be exercised?

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References

Scripture references are from the Authorized Version except where indicated otherwise.

1. By "Invisible Church" we mean the whole company of the redeemed whose names are "written in the Lamb's book of life", whether in heaven or on earth.
2. The epithets "visible" and "universal", like "invisible" (see note 1), mean different things to different people. We use the term "universal" as equivalent to "invisible". Of course, the Universal Church is always partly visible. But even then, those who appear to belong to the Church may be members only in a formal sense.
3. The question arises of necessity as to what constitutes the local church. In New Testament times the local church consisted of all believers in one locality who formed one congregation. Denominationalism has sadly fragmented the local church.
4. Paul could be referring to the church in Corinth itself in this statement. Both he and Peter were held in high esteem by members in the church who acknowledged their authority as extending to them.
5. Clearly the phrase cannot be restricted to the Church on earth, but includes all those who are Abraham's seed because they are Christ's (Gal 3:29) ie the elect race as a whole.

The means which God has ordained for giving expression to the unity we have as Christians is the honouring of the mutual obligations which He has laid upon us — eg to love one another (John 13:34,35) and to pursue that oneness of mind, heart and life which will be the outcome of our being 'sanctified in the truth' (John 17:17-23). It is the honouring of these obligations that is to tell the world that we are one, not the provision of a self-perpetuating hierarchy of priests and bishops headed by a Pope, speciously claiming that it constitutes 'the visible sign (and source) of the unity of the whole Church'. Today, as in the past, such hierarchical superstructures have only served to perpetuate 'churches' which have long since departed from New Testament doctrines and standards.

J Elwyn Davies 'STRIVING TOGETHER'

Book Review

One in the Truth?

Robert Amess

Kingsway Publications

160pp, £4.95

The reviewer labours under some difficulties. First and foremost he is writing for a theological journal, which he would not consider to be his forte anyway, a review of a work which states plainly 'This book is not a theological textbook' (p 19). Secondly, he has to be prepared, if necessary, to be critical of an author with whom he has enjoyed much fellowship and whom he values highly in the love of Christ. Thirdly, he writes remembering that he is in fellowship with a body which pleads for separation from 'mixed denominations' and this book does not make that plea. There is no difficulty, however, in understanding the burden of the author, there is no difficulty in appreciating the Christ-like love which emanates from every chapter, there is no difficulty in realising that this author is not motivated by emotion but by the truth as revealed in the Word of God; he takes his Bible seriously.

In the book's ten chapters Robert Amess directs his readers to what he considers to be the fundamental issues at stake, that those who profess to be in Christ are guilty of serious sin if, because of disagreement on other issues, they exclude from their fellowship any who are Christ's and who honour His Word and truth. He sees, and has experienced, an increasing spirit of

contentiousness in evangelical circles which he judges to be an evil cancer destroying the effective witness of gospel churches. 'Evangelicalism today is not marked by mutual trust and affection, but rather by distrust, recrimination and animosity.' So writes the author in the opening chapter, p 11. It sounds rather blunt, very sweeping. But read him, he does not use words idly. There will be those whose view of the 'Regulative Principle' will lead them to other conclusions. This has not been overlooked (chapter 9, **Misunderstandings**, p 139), though it is an unfortunate blemish that the word which should be 'regulative' has been printed as 'regulation'.

The first chapter, **All One in Christ Jesus?**, opens with the question 'Why should a book on Evangelical Unity be regarded as controversial?' and suggests that part of the answer is that separation is of the climate of today. The five sections that follow — 'This book is not about separation but Evangelical unity', '...is not about Evangelical compromise', '...is not about Evangelical uniformity', '...is not a theological textbook' and '...is not written by an authority on these matters', indicate the burden, the heart, the direction and the boundaries of the work. The biblical foundation upon which Mr Amess proceeds is clearly seen in the short chapter 2, **Unity between Whom?** Here more than a brief 'Jesus is Lord' is required, there is no comfort for those who say the Apostles' Creed 'with their fingers crossed

behind their backs'! Donald MacLeod's eighteen fundamental truths are quoted with approbation. This doctrinal and scriptural emphasis undergirds the whole work.

It is in chapter 3, **Christian Unity in the New Testament**, that the biblical ground for unity is examined. This is conducted under seven heads: 'One body', 'One Spirit', 'One hope', 'One Lord', 'One faith', 'One baptism', 'One God and Father of all'. It is interesting that the late E J Poole-Connor should be quoted by the author: 'Recently E J Poole-Connor has been extensively quoted to endorse a "separatist" position. But his book "Evangelical Unity" argues a different case'. Mr Amess refers to him several times; the most telling quote appears on p 31, it is a quote of a quote from D M Pantou: 'No divergence of doctrine or ritual or practice can destroy a union which is based on life; nor is it possible to be unchurched by intellectual error when our organic union is fathoms deeper than intellectual. Unity in doctrine is impossible, unity in taste and sentiment is impossible; unity in attainment and experience is impossible; but unity in life is not only possible: it is a fact.' I certainly endorse the spirit of the author in his approach to 'One baptism' although I would hesitate to suggest that the phrase refers to the outward act of water baptism itself (and I am a convinced baptist!). The section dealing with One God and Father has good emphasis on the necessity of a covenant and doctrinal basis in a local church. 'Evangelical unity is not a denial of church discipline. In fact it can only really be accomplished among those where it is exercised.' He continues, 'It is a salutary

discovery that the New Testament speaks more of the sin of schism than ever it does of the errors of compromise', and at that point goes on to declare that second degree separation is based on the flimsiest of scriptural exegesis.

In dealing with **Biblical Separation**, chapter 4, the author is quite clear that there can be no indifference to such doctrinal deviations as do occur in 'mainline' denominations. His deep concern is to define *biblical* separation. This he seeks to do from the basis of 1 John: the test of obedience 1:3-6 and 5:1-4; the test of love 2:7-11; and of doctrine 2:18, along with 2:19-29; 4:1-6; 5:1-12. In dealing with obedience the matter of the difference between church fellowship and personal fellowship is handled with a helpful quote from Poole-Connor. Once again the evangelical integrity of Robert Amess is plain '...it would seem to me an impossibility for a man to be identified with or a member of a denomination whose doctrinal position is in clear contradiction to the gospel. Sadly, even that is not as clearly understood by some as it should be.' The second test reminds us that '...obedience is not a contradiction of love... love is a command... If you are disobedient about love then you fail the previous test on obedience...' The test of love is explored under six points before going on to the third test, that of doctrine. 'If a fellowship, however inadequate or divergent on secondary matters, seeks to enthrone him, (the Lord Jesus) then they are not to be avoided. But if a church... leaves the Lord Jesus outside — then it must be avoided like the plague. The test is the Lord Jesus Christ himself'. 'Here

(says the author) is the infallible test: "What do you think of Christ?" That question for Mr Amess is no empty remark. It means for him 'pre-existent deity, virgin birth, sinless life, sacrificial atoning death, bodily resurrection, physical ascension, visible personal return and eternal reign'; any who prevaricate here are 'against Christ'. This for the author is *the* basis for unity, therefore it is also *the* test to which, blatant sin apart, no other test can biblically be added.

'In it to win it', 'Guilt by association', 'Second degree separation', Chapter 5 introduces **Some Present-Day Clichés**. Obviously the author, being the pastor of a church affiliated to the Baptist Union, has a real interest in these phrases. It must be said that he is not merely defensive of his own position and seeks to examine the matter biblically and with the feeling of one who has had to work his way through hard experience. 'It is strange that I have found it easier to be consistent for the truth as I understand it within denominationalism than I have within separatist circles. In the former there has often been warm friendship and constructive support at best, and benign indifference at worst. In the latter, at best the peace and joy that comes from being with brethren of like mind and experience, and at worst downright coldness and hostility'. The reviewer finds that a very sad commentary on present day evangelicalism; unfortunately it is all too often the result of our tendency to 'label' and 'pigeon-hole' other believers. Mr Amess gives consideration to 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; pursues his argument and comes to the conclusion that no man

should put himself in a position where he is to be hindered from preaching the pure Gospel of Christ. Further, that for a family to join a church that is 'dead', the Gospel just not being there, merely because it is a local church, is plainly wrong. Christ and His Gospel become the criteria. Evincing arguments from the letters to the seven churches of Asia, he is at pains to point out that, with all their shortcomings and in some cases, sin (even Laodicea!), they were still churches, there is no command to other believers to withdraw from them. Dealing with the cliché itself, his conclusion is that there is no command to go into denominations to win them, there is only a command to go into the world to preach the Gospel. If a man is ministering in a church where the Gospel is loved and where he has absolute freedom to declare the whole counsel of God, the cliché does not apply.

'Guilt by association' is likewise not 'dismissed at a stroke'. The author's own experience comes much to the fore here; not everybody would necessarily agree with the conclusions he reached during the various situations he had to face. But then, the book is about that precise point. What is clear in Mr Amess' mind is, that where a man stands clearly on and for the Gospel, he stands before God alone. 'In that regard I am not my brother's keeper. If, for instance, a minister of the FIEC denies his Statement of Faith, this does not make all the other ministers guilty. However, they do have a responsibility to remonstrate... to win him back... or to discipline him...' 'It is ridiculous and offensive to say that I am guilty because I have associated with a man I have never heard, would

not recognise by sight, who would never be allowed in my pulpit, and whose views if I ever heard them would be an anathema to me.'

'Second degree separation' is introduced by quoting Dr Peter Masters and stating that under such a definition second degree separation is undoubtedly right. The four reasons Dr Masters adduces for that position are also given and approved. The author then goes on to deal with the problem as it has impinged upon evangelicalism to its hurt. He quotes clause 4 of the statement made by those ministers who met at Rugby in 1984 (p 84) and graciously explains his problem, believing that it has the tendency to cause further division. The problem about this section is that what is generally understood by the term 'second degree separation' is not precisely defined and therefore the argument against it is not as clearly put as it might have been.

Such a topic could not be handled without an examination of the problem of the reformed/non-reformed, charismatic/non-charismatic, mixed/separatist etc, and a short chapter is entitled **Evangelical Groupings**. Whilst the New Testament letters are directed toward some particular problem to rebuke, encourage, redirect, there is 'never ever the denial of brotherhood or the refusal of fellowship with those who are in Christ'. Whilst the author is at pains to defend the Christianity of, say, charismatics, even though he may not personally accept their premises, he is likewise faithful in his declaration of warmth, life and love amongst reformed churches. He makes a plea for unity and acceptance of one another on the

ground of 'Truth, Honesty, Trust and Love'. However, there is no 'papering over the cracks'. A clear challenge is presented to those evangelical Anglicans who are anxious to court Rome (pp 98/99). The chapter ends with a robust challenge as to the truth of some suppositions regarding the integrity of evangelical Anglicans, and of the attitudes of independents.

Chapter 7 concerning **Para-Church Events**, is handled with great sensitivity and is obviously the result of much pastoral experience in the field. The reviewer found himself greatly challenged by the clear presentation of the problems alongside the sincere, godly and pastoral approach of the author. The issues of 'Spring Harvest', 'Mission England', and 'Bible Colleges', with all the multifarious problems which follow, throw up situations which are often used as tests of orthodoxy. Strong criticism is made of those who make statements which border on the libellous, pp 110/111; but a plea is also made to those who organise multi-church missions to be sensitive to those who do hold other views.

Sectarianism is seen as a potential danger in the quest for separation. Some eighteen pages are given over to this issue together with a timely warning to those whose strong leadership seems to border on the near infallible. A quote from Poole-Connor on p 129 together with some strong comments on those whose 'rejection of others is sheer wickedness' reveals the author's deep concern. The reviewer found himself in disagreement with the author and his view of the Lord's Supper and the discipline of the local church, p 123.

If the local church is important and has a discipline, as the author acknowledges earlier, then surely the church has a scriptural responsibility to separate a believer from fellowship until repentance is evident.

A short, helpful chapter on **Mis-understandings** brings the book to **Where Do We Go From Here?** Mr Amess wisely does not take on the mantle of a prophet. We all undergo change, pp 145/146; if we refuse to we may be too closed to the work of the Spirit, p 147. The dangers of a perfectionist ecclesiology are pointed out and the benefits of a rigid approach to separation are seriously questioned by reference to an actual event, p 151. Finally, the Bedford Document is reproduced and its approach to inter-church unity commended. There is warm support and great encouragement for the work of the Evangelical Alliance and for the British Evangelical Council.

‘Every church leader should read this,’ writes Dr R T Kendall in the Forward. He is right. They should.

For those who read this journal the question will be asked, ‘Does the acceptance of the approach of Robert Amess make the BEC irrelevant?’ My answer to that is ‘No, it does not.’ The BEC was founded as a vehicle for those who wanted to pursue the aims of evangelical unity together, without the hindrance and compromise of the Ecumenical Movement. It is committed to a policy of evangelical unity and to the proclamation of the biblical Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those objects are not in any way eroded by the thesis of this book. But this book does challenge us to re-examine our approach to these matters; there is a need for us to take

the Scriptures raised very seriously and question our own suppositions in the light of them. It is this reviewer’s opinion that we too often determine our position on these matters by studying history and then taking the Scripture into account, instead of studying Scripture and then taking history into account. By no means must we go ‘soft’ on the liberal Ecumenical Movement; by all means we must be ‘soft’ with true blood-bought children of our Lord and Master. The question of ‘denominations’ and church ‘groupings’ is raised by the nature of the work. That issue is one which could not be adequately handled in such a compass and perhaps needs dealing with as a separate, though related, matter.

Some sentences seem rather difficult to read even though the general sense could be understood; perhaps some grammarian or literary buff needs to look at the writings of a pastor; we tend to write as we speak! On pages 77 and 82 what should read as ‘seceded’ has been printed as ‘succeeded’; that together with the other error already mentioned (p 139) prompts the question as to whether the printer uses a proof-reader who understands the subject matter of the book being published.

Altogether a very warm, serious and challenging work. It may well prove to be an important book. If it sends us to our Bibles and to our knees it will have been worth the time and the cost.

The Rev Donovan Rowland
Secretary AGBC(SE)

Scripture and Tradition

Hywel Jones

The article is part of a larger work to be published in the Spring of 1989 by the Evangelical Press of Wales under the title, ONE GOSPEL — ONE CHURCH. Other chapters in the book include the Death of Christ, Justification by Faith Alone, Baptism Eucharist and Ministry, Mission and Evangelism.

1963 was an important year in ecumenical discussion of the nature and status of the Bible. In July of that year, the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, one of a series of conferences organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC), was held in Montreal. One of the subjects studied there was 'Scripture, Tradition and Traditions'.¹

This was not the first occasion for an ecumenical gathering to consider the Bible. Prior to Montreal, a number of conferences had been held in the years immediately following the Second World War, and the work put into these culminated in a conference which was held at Wadham College, Oxford in 1949. A statement was issued by this meeting entitled 'Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible'.² It was the fruit of discussions about how to approach certain social and political questions and is fairly brief and general in character. No Roman Catholics contributed to it, though the Orthodox Churches were represented. Following Montreal, a number of study groups and plenary Faith and Order Conferences met to do further work on aspects of the statement which it had produced. These were held at Bristol in 1957, at Louvain in 1971 and at Bangalore in 1978. They concentrated on hermeneutics, authority and the relation between the Old and New Testaments respectively.

Though it was one conference among others, Montreal was a watershed for ecumenical study of the Bible, and it was so in two major respects. On the one hand, a **breakthrough** was effected there and, on the other, a decisive **breach**. We will consider each of these in turn.

THE BREAKTHROUGH

As all the churches in the WCC are doctrinally related to the Bible in some way or other, an approach to it which is common to all participants in the ecumenical venture is essential. The Bible is therefore a vital matter not only for evangelicalism but also for ecumenism, though not in the same way, as we shall see. Lukas Vischer writes, 'to form a relationship of effective common witness, it is essential that the churches reach a common understanding of the authority and use of the Bible in the life and witness of the church'.³

Two things which happened at Montreal helped to bring about the

breakthrough which we are seeking to describe. First, there were Roman Catholics present. While they had only taken up observer status unlike the Orthodox who were full members of the Council, they could not have been more active. As a result, it was possible for the first time to perceive the ecumenical problem in all its aspects. Secondly, the Conference gave attention to one of the issues which had created the basic divide in the Reformation between the Roman Catholics on the one hand and Protestants on the other. This was the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Did God reveal Himself and His will sufficiently and supremely in Holy Scripture alone or by the traditions of the apostles handed down orally in the church as well? If this deadlock could be eased and freed, then progress could be achieved not only on the Scripture-Tradition issue, but on every other theological issue as well.

Given a subject with such a degree of controversy attached to it, one might think that with only the Wadham Statement behind it, the delegates were taking an exceedingly bold step. However, this was not the case. Much had happened between 1949 and 1962/3 with regard to the Scripture-Tradition question on both sides of the Reformation divide, and so the risk factor involved in tackling the subject head on was minimal. Apart from the effect generated by the ecumenical phenomenon and experience, two events need to be noted in this change.

The first event was The Third World Faith and Order Conference held in 1952 at Lund in Sweden. This demonstrated what had been happening in Protestantism with regard to our subject. Secondly, there was another gathering, a council, not a conference, namely, the unexpected and famed **Second Vatican Council** which met in the autumn of 1962. This gave an indication of what was happening in Roman Catholicism on the same matter. Though barely six months elapsed between the Council and the Montreal Conference, theologians were well aware of each other's views prior to those gatherings. A new route was opened up to study the relationship between Scripture-Tradition. Indeed, this was evidently the case with Vatican II.

The Lund Conference, with 'Schism, Heresy and Apostasy' as its subject, gave to many an experience of a theological impasse, because the representatives of each church viewed these matters from the perspective of their own denominational history. This was described in a British journal of the time under the caption, 'The Ecumenical Dead-End Kids'.⁴ As a result, a resolution was passed to set up a theological commission with the task of exploring more deeply 'the resources for further ecumenical discussion to be found in that common history which we have as Christians'.⁵

When this approved motion reached the Working Committee in 1953, it was decided to appoint an interim committee:

'to study the problem of tradition in all its biblical and historical aspects, paying particular attention to the problem as it had been put before us in recent literature in order to bring out the importance and need for such a study for ecumenical understanding'.⁶

This committee was set up in two sections, one in North America and the other

in Europe. They approached this theme in differing but complementary ways. The American group viewed the subject from a historical standpoint; the Europeans treated it theologically. Their reports came before the Montreal Conference.

Clearly, enough had been said and done to encourage Montreal to tackle the subject of Scripture and Tradition from a standpoint other than that of *Sola Scriptura*, ie, Scripture versus Tradition.

Coupled, with this, of course was the awareness of what had happened at the opening session of the Second Vatican Council where it seemed that Scripture was being spoken of favourably vis à vis Tradition. The Montreal Report could state, 'We are aware that in Roman Catholic theology the concept of Tradition is undergoing serious reconsideration'.⁷

Prior to Montreal, Father Yves M Congar, the author of a massive work entitled *TRADITION AND TRADITIONS*,⁸ had submitted a comment on the reports of the two working groups which were to be tabled at the Conference. In that comment he had referred to the writings of G H Tavad (who was at Montreal) and Karl Rahner on the subject of Tradition. These progressive Roman Catholic theologians were very influential in the run-up to Vatican II and afterwards.

What happened at the opening session of Vatican II⁹ must now be briefly summarised. Of the sixteen documents which emerged from the Council, only two are dignified with the title *DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION*. These are entitled *LUMEN GENTIUM* (The Light of the Nations) and *DEI VERBUM* (The Word of God) and they relate to the church and to revelation respectively. They are most important promulgations and the distinctive theology of Vatican II is to be found in them.

DEI VERBUM (with which we are concerned) is five times shorter than *LUMEN GENTIUM*, and yet it took one more year for it to be finalised. This was not due to the fact that it had not been discussed during the second session of the Council, but rather because the statement that was initially tabled on the Scripture-Tradition issue had run into such difficulty that the whole subject had to be reinvestigated. This prepared statement, entitled *DE FONTIBUS REVELATIONIS* (Concerning the Sources of Revelation) was bitterly opposed when it came before the Council. Cardinal Liénart expressed his opposition in the following words:

'This schema (ie, the prepared document) does not please me. It is not adequate to the matter it purports to deal with, namely, Scripture and Tradition. There are not and never have been two sources of revelation. The Word of God is the unique source of revelation. This schema is a cold and scholastic formula, while revelation is a supreme gift of God — God speaking directly to us. We should be thinking more along the lines of our separated brothers who have such a love and veneration for the Word of God. Our duty now is to cultivate the faith of our people and cease to condemn'.¹⁰

This protest and approach to the question of Scripture-Tradition was so

strongly supported in the Council that it became necessary for the Pope to intervene. He decided to withdraw the offending schema and appointed a special commission to revise it. Progressive theologians were appointed to this working group and the result was DEI VERBUM. With this and Lund behind it, the Montreal Conference could take up the Scripture-Tradition question without fear of being stabbed in the back. Commenting on both DEI VERBUM and the Montreal Statement, Flesseman - van Leer writes: 'Both statements deal with identical or similar problems; both are official statements and can therefore be considered as giving a general overall picture of the respective positions. One cannot expect bold and new theological insights in documents of this kind, but exactly for that reason they are a gauge for present day thinking'.¹¹

Dei Verbum

DEI VERBUM consists of a short preface and twenty-six articles, arranged in six chapters. These concern Revelation (ch 1), its Transmission (ch 2), Scripture — its Inspiration and Interpretation (chs 3-5) and Scripture in the Life of the Church (ch 6). What we must do is to examine this statement to see if it represents a real shift from the position promulgated at the Council of Trent in 1546,¹² and, if so, whether this was a move towards the theology of the Reformation on the Scripture-Tradition question. We must look then at what it says about revelation, tradition and scripture. Before we do this, however, there is one detailed but important matter which we must consider.

It is well known that DEI VERBUM encouraged personal and private reading of the Scriptures by the faithful, and the setting up of societies for their translation and distribution even jointly with 'separated brethren'. This has come to be regarded as positive proof not only of a positive change in Rome, but also of a move in a Protestant direction. But it needs to be borne in mind that it is still the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church which alone has the grace and right to interpret those Scriptures authentically. This is classic Roman Catholicism and is referred to in the very chapter of DEI VERBUM (ch 6) where such reading and translation of the Scriptures are encouraged. Article 25 declares:

'It belongs to the bishops, "among whom the apostolic doctrine resides", to prepare the faithful in their care, at the right time, to make proper use of the divine books, especially of those of the New Covenant and first of all the Gospels. This should be done through translations of the sacred texts, to which necessary explanations that should be truly sufficient are attached'.¹³

We must now consider what DEI VERBUM has to say about revelation, tradition and Scripture.

Revelation

DEI VERBUM is the most important official statement ever issued by the Roman Catholic church on this crucial subject, which lies not only at the centre of contemporary theological discussion but also of Christianity itself.

The first paragraph ¹⁴ contains the constitutive elements of the doctrine which is unfolded in the articles which follow it and the following six emphases appear in this statement:

1. Revelation is set in a Trinitarian framework. Each Person of the Trinity is seen at work either in its disclosure or in its reception.
2. Revelation depends upon the sovereign act of God, and it is effected because sovereignty is clothed with goodness, wisdom and abundant love.
3. Revelation is both based upon and focussed in the Person of Christ, 'the Word made flesh', through whom all revelation comes and in whom it reaches its acme.
4. The necessity of revelation is alluded to in the description of God as 'invisible', its progressive character indicated in the words 'the history of salvation' and its finality implied in what is said about Christ being its 'fulness'.
5. The content of revelation is described in terms of 'God and His saving purpose, and this is accomplished by deeds and words in close and specified relationship to each other'.
6. The purpose of revelation is presented as the bringing of man into fellowship with and likeness to God.

Apart from minor criticisms... all these statements are quite unexceptionable as a summary of revelation. To leave the matter here, however, would be incredibly naive. Every credal or confessional statement... is historically conditioned. It bears the marks of the circumstances in which it was formulated, the conflicts which necessitated it, and the thinking of those who drew it up and their purpose in doing so. It is mainly points 5 and 6 above which are signposts to the situation in which this statement on divine revelation is set.

The statements of people actually involved in the formulation of *DEI VERBUM* are of great help here. Two such are Bishop B C Butler and Joseph Ratzinger. They were appointed by Pope John's elected commission to serve on a subcommission. We shall make use of their comments.

Bishop Butler has a chapter entitled 'Revelation and Inspiration' in his valuable book *THE THEOLOGY OF VATICAN II*.¹⁵ With regard to *DEI VERBUM*'s treatment of revelation, he comments that it, 'does not begin, as a manual of dogmatic theology might, with a scholastic definition of the meaning of "divine revelation" considered as a term of general connotation'.¹⁶

The emphasis in the preface is unambiguously placed on the interpersonal character of revelation — what Butler, echoing Buber's terminology, calls the 'Thou-and-I-relationship'. Ratzinger makes the identical point in his commentary on this chapter in *COMMENTARY ON THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II*.¹⁷ There he refers to the work of René Latourelle who has shown with painstaking detail the correspondence between Vatican I (held in 1870; it issued the decree on papal infallibility) and II on this matter. Ratzinger also points out that Latourelle has mentioned the differences between the two Councils. These differences show how thinking on the subject of revelation

has undergone a change in the intervening ninety years, one more minor than the other but neither without real significance demonstrate this. First, Vatican I attributes revelation to 'goodness and wisdom'; Vatican II to 'His goodness and wisdom'. This emphasises the personal element. Secondly, Vatican I speaks of the content of revelation as 'the eternal decree of His will'; Vatican II changes this to the 'Sacramentum of His will'. Ratzinger's comment on this latter change is worth noting:

'Instead of the legalistic view that sees revelation largely as the issuing of divine decrees, we have a sacramental view, which sees law and grace, word and deed, message and sign, the person and his utterance within the one comprehensive unity of the mystery'.¹⁸

A further contrast concerns the position which the knowledge of God, obtained by the exercise of man's reason, occupies in the two Council's definitions. In Vatican I it comes at the beginning; in Vatican II at the end. One cannot escape the feeling that it has been appended rather summarily in Vatican II, and not integrated with what precedes it. But the fact that it *is* included is important. For all the emphasis on divine revelation, natural theology is not repudiated. There are still two ways to know God.

The leading characteristic, then, of this 'new' emphasis is its insistence that divine revelation is *from* a Person, *of* a Person, *to* a person, and that it is the means by which those two persons come together.

Bishop Butler refers to Tanqueray's scholastic definition of revelation, namely, that revelation is 'the manifestation of some truth made to us by God through a supernatural illumination of our mind'.¹⁹ He then proceeds to characterise two views pictorially as follows:

'We are not in the schoolroom where a divine philosopher, himself unseen, dictates abstract ideas to pupils of high intelligence. We seem rather to be in the original paradise, where an infinitely loving God calls to us, accepts us as his friends, woos us to his friendship'.²⁰

Bishop Butler finds evidence in *DEI VERBUM* of tension between these two views of revelation. He writes, 'The first chapter of *DE DIVINA REVELATIO* shows signs of a conflict between a conceptualist and a more biblical notion of revelation'.²¹ As the ground on which this verdict is based, he refers to the latent ambiguity in the word *revelation* for it can mean 'either the act of revealing or the truths revealed'.²² The Constitution does use it in both ways.

In *DEI VERBUM*, however, the weight of emphasis falls on the personalist and not the propositional element. This harmonises also with Protestant theologising about the nature of revelation.

Tradition

The opening words of the second chapter, called The Transmission of Divine Revelation, of *DEI VERBUM* declare, 'In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations'. The question which this statement evokes is: How does this come about? The

answer of this chapter — and it is the classic answer of Roman Catholicism — is that it is *not only* by Scripture that this is effected, but also by Tradition, and so the chapter draws out the relevance of both for the process of transmission of revelation.

One sentence in this chapter supplies a convenient framework for the treatment of our subject. It is:

‘Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing from the same divine well spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and tend and move towards the same goal’.

This sentence presents us with three elements regarding Tradition, viz, its source, unity and purpose.

1 The Source of Tradition and Scripture

Article 7 deals with this and describes the source of both Tradition and Scripture as being *from God through Christ and by the Holy Spirit*.

Christ the Lord is the One ‘in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion’ and also the One who initiates the process by which that revelation which He was and proclaimed is transmitted. He commissioned apostles ‘to preach to all men that gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching’ and they carried out this charge ‘by their oral preaching, by example, and by ordinances’. Some of the apostles ‘committed the message of salvation to writing’, as did others who are termed ‘apostolic men’, but both groups did so ‘under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit’. This is the first stage in the process of the transmission of revelation.

Note, however, that the view of Tradition presented here is already larger in content than the contents of Scripture. The fulfilment of the Lord’s commission is not linked exclusively with the inspiration of the message of salvation. It also includes, and this before the other, the handing on by the apostles not only ‘what they had received from the lips of Christ’ but ‘from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit’. This is sacred Tradition — oral tradition — which is extra to written Scripture.

The second stage concerns the bishops. The Constitution does... claim that the apostles handed over ‘their own teaching role’ to them. This was done ‘to keep the gospel forever whole and alive within the church’. We are left then with a body of material, some written and unwritten, which in its entirety can be traced backwards from the bishops, a continuing order in the church, through the apostles, to God in Christ. This puts extra-scriptural material in the same category as Scripture and, therefore, on the same basis of authority.

2 The Unity of Tradition and Scripture

The presence of the words ‘in some fashion’ in the quotation we are analysing prevents a *total* identification between Scripture and Tradition, but nevertheless it asserts that they do coalesce. They are, therefore, not to be totally separated. That they do merge is clear from the following words,

'Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God which is committed to the church'.²³ But how can Tradition be called 'the Word of God'? The answer includes three elements, namely, the original content, the development and the use of Tradition.

a) The Original Content of Tradition

Article 8 puts forward a case based on 2 Thessalonians 2:15, where Paul speaks of the traditions he had taught 'by word or our epistle'. In the light of this text, the Article claims that what the apostles gained from Christ, in ways that were open to them alone, was of the same character, whether it was subsequently committed to writing in Scripture or passed on orally. Therefore, *both* can rightly be termed 'the Word of God'.

b) The Continuing Development of Tradition

We are told that 'the church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes'. There is a link here between the teaching, life and worship of the church subsequent to the New Testament and the preaching, example and ordinances of the apostles as recorded in the New Testament. Now to admit that what the apostles taught orally was *more* than what they set down in Scripture is obvious and incontestable; but to assert that there is identity and harmony between that oral teaching and what the church subsequently teaches is quite another matter. This is what is claimed above and it is further explained, 'This tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down'.

The assertion here is that this growing understanding is the result of the activity of the Holy Spirit. *This is a massive claim.* Bishop Butler makes the point that this paragraph in Article 8 is 'practically a précis of Newman's theory of the development of doctrine'. The essence of this assertion is that a developing tradition is the Word of God, not only because it is in harmony with apostolic teaching, but also because it is an unfolding of it. It is in this way that the dogmas of papal infallibility and the perpetual virginity and bodily assumption of Mary are substantiated. It is this line of reasoning which makes us question the validity of this theology of Tradition.

c) The Use of Tradition

That Sacred Tradition is used in much the same way as Sacred Scripture, appears in the following statement from Article 8:

'This happens (ie development and growth) through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts, through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth... The words of the Holy Fathers witness to the living presence of this tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying church... It is not from sacred Scripture alone that the church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore, both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence .

3 The Purpose of Tradition and Scripture

Their goal is to perfect the church; by them 'the church constantly moves forward toward the fulness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her'.²⁴ This points in the direction of both being *necessary* for the life of the church which must regard them both as God's self-disclosure.

We are now in a position to consider the view of tradition as put forward in this document. The use of the word 'Tradition' in the singular and in its capitalised form represents a decided shift from the position of Trent and Vatican I on this subject. It may be compared with what we have noted in relation to revelation where a living reality is presented rather than expressed propositions. In this way, *tradita* (things handed down) can be likened to *revelata* (things revealed), and *traditio* (tradition) to *revelatio* (revelation).

While the concept of Vatican II may be termed abstract, it should not be thought of as theoretical. It is a rather dynamic concept; it is a Spirit-superintended process which links the present with the past on one hand and, as it has not yet reached its climax, with the future on the other. Such a concept diverts attention from the particular traditions themselves. It also makes it easier to believe in their continuity with the past, even though this cannot be demonstrated from the historical or literary point of view. Tradition is an all-embracing concept, a developing and enveloping, unfolding and enfolding reality. This is reflected in the way in which Tradition is always placed before Scripture in this chapter of DEI VERBUM. Indeed, it is said that by Tradition, 'the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and increasingly made active in her'.

Tradition is the dominant idea in the transmission of revelation, and Scripture is but a part of it. This is reinforced by the claim in Article 12 that in interpreting Scripture, account must be taken of 'the living tradition of the whole church'. Bishop Butler expresses the point as follows:

'In fact, then, Sacred Tradition should not be distinguished from Scripture as though they were two distinct realities, but only as a whole is distinguishable from one of its constituents. The relevant theological question is not: "what does tradition give us that Scripture does not contain?", but "what is the function of Scripture within the total fact of tradition"'.²⁵

In his book *HOLY WRIT OR HOLY CHURCH*,²⁶ G H Tavad maintains that this was the church's view on this subject prior to the fourteenth century. However, it may be noted that this position in no way protects itself against the Protestant charge that the traditions which have resulted from the process of transmission have distorted the original deposit of apostolic teaching, whether these found expression in Scripture or not. Ratzinger admits this, and instances the opposition of Oscar Cullmann and J K S Reid on this score. This becomes particularly acute in the face of the following claim made for the magisterium:

‘The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ’.²⁷

From Tradition and Scripture as God’s revelation, we are brought to the church as its embodiment and interpreter.

Scripture

In chapters 3-5 of *DEI VERBUM* the Bible itself is the focus of attention. The fourth and fifth chapters are concerned with the Old and New Testaments respectively, and the divine origin and inspiration of each is declared. We will concentrate on the third chapter because it is here, under the heading of ‘The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of Sacred Scripture’, that we face the question of ‘whether the Catholic Church is committed to a kind of biblical fundamentalism’.²⁸

The Roman Catholic Church has always upheld the full infallibility of Holy Scripture. Neither of the two great divisions within Christendom occurred over this doctrine. It was held by the Council of Trent and by Vatican I; Vatican II in Article II declares that

‘the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts’ were ‘written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit’ and therefore ‘have God for their Author... It follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation’.

When the modernist movement was gaining momentum within the RC Church at the beginning of this century, Popes Leo XIII then Pius X banned, then attempted in various ways to root out, modernism both from their colleges and dioceses climaxing in the imposition of an anti-modernist oath on all clerics from 1910. Thus the movement was practically extinguished.²⁹

However, this crisis was never really resolved, and even in 1961 professors at the Biblical Institute in Rome were banned. Pius XII’s decree, generally referred to as the *Magna Carta* of catholic biblical scholarship, maintains the traditional position of the magisterium while allowing greater freedom to biblical scholars. The same kind of tension is found in *DEI VERBUM*. On the one hand, the inspiration of Scripture is endorsed, but on the other, the humanness of the Scriptures is recognised, and the consequent need for the ‘interpreter to investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture’.

This is taken as far as a limitation of inerrancy. ‘The books of Scripture’ teach ‘without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation’ but no more. Only what is necessary to salvation is what is set down inerrantly in Scripture. This loophole enables the RC biblical scholar to operate in areas which were previously forbidden and to work in

conjunction with Protestant biblical scholars — but always within the limits of Roman Catholic dogma, as the case of Hans Küng makes clear. Article 19 of DEI VERBUM endorses the view which sees the Gospels as documents composed in the light of the post-Easter faith of the church, but maintains that their contents are 'true and sincere'. According to B C Butler, DEI VERBUM exhibits an attempt 'to steer a course between the Scylla of radicalism and the Charybdis of Fundamentalism'.³⁰

DEI VERBUM is a statement which does strike out into a new world and in a new spirit. But it does this while retaining its links with classical Roman Catholic dogma as expressed in Trent and Vatican I. The change visible in Vatican II is not superficial, but neither is it substantial. Flesseman-van Leer writes:

'As long as that possibility (ie that Tradition includes truths not in Scripture) has to be kept open, the Tridentine concept of Tradition and its quantitative thinking is not really overcome; no more is it possible to bind Tradition in a strict way to Scripture, let alone allow it to stand under its judgement. Consequently, the assertion that the ultimate source of faith is the Word of God, deposited in the togetherness of Tradition and Scripture does not sound convincing, for ultimately Scripture is dispensable'.³¹

For all that DEI VERBUM says about the Word of God, it is still the church which is supreme!

We turn now to the Montreal Statement to see how Scripture and Tradition are dealt with there.

The Montreal Statement

This is set out in 39 paragraphs, numbered 38-76, and consists of an introduction, three main sections and an appendix. Because of lack of conference time, only the first of the main sections was fully discussed and supported. The other two were generally recommended for study. The three main sections are entitled Scripture, Tradition and Traditions; The Unity of Tradition and the Diversity of Traditions; The Christian Tradition and Cultural Diversity.

In terms of length, the treatment of Scripture consists of only seven sentences which comprise paragraph 42 and it is nowhere as full as DEI VERBUM. It must, however, be remembered that the statement was the work of days, not years, yet surely more could have been said. Shortage of time cannot totally absolve Montreal. Ellen Flesseman-van Leer admits that the statement is surprisingly tentative and explains the fact in terms of the presence of representatives of Orthodox Churches and also the major problem of the One Tradition vis-à-vis the many traditions. We will consider the statement in relation to revelation, inspiration and authority.

1 Scripture and Revelation

Revelation is regarded, though not specified, as the necessary precursor of Scripture. But what is revelation?

a) The *essence* of revelation is that it is the self-disclosure of God. But the 'propositional' view is not favoured for paragraph 67 states: 'the content of the Tradition cannot be exactly defined, for the reality it transmits can never be fully contained in propositional forms'.

b) The *character* of revelation is described as historical and personal in the sense that it is conveyed in the history of Israel and in Christ. Although there is a welcome emphasis on the time-space reality of revelation, there is no mention of what was revelatory in that history. Was it deeds or words or both? With regard to revelation in Christ, the idea of fullness is not brought out as clearly as in DEI VERBUM. There is also no mention of the inter-relation between Israel and Christ within the general framework of revelation.

c) The *relation* between revelation and Scripture is summed up in the words which close the paragraph: 'The Bible is the treasure of the Word of God'.

Revelation is associated with the Word of God and the Bible is said to *contain* it. The Bible, therefore, is not to be regarded in toto as revelation. The favourite concept used here is that of bearing witness; eg 'to give witness to the revelation given...' Scripture is *human* testimony to revelation and, therefore, it is fallible. This is all of a piece with the view of revelation as personal and not propositional; it accords with the note struck by the progressive theologians in DEI VERBUM. Furthermore, the use of the word 'inaugurated' is ambiguous in connection with the ministries of prophets and apostles and leaves open the possibility of some kind of apostolic succession.

2 Scripture and Inspiration

The statement about inspiration is slight. The word is used only in connection with a response to revelation which is predicated equally of 'apostles and disciples'. Who are these 'disciples'? Are they the 'apostolic men' of DEI VERBUM, those authors of New Testament books who were not themselves apostles?

If they were 'apostolic men', it will be seen from the statement that inspiration is extended only to them and not to their written testimony, as 2 Timothy 3:16 requires. Furthermore, the Scriptures were produced following the 'oral and written tradition of the prophets and apostles' and 'under the guidance of the Holy Spirit'. This reference to the fact that traditions lie behind the Scriptural records indicates the recognition granted to oral tradition, source and form criticism in New Testament studies. This contributes to the elevation of Tradition over Scripture in practical terms and also, of course, projects the church.

If, on the other hand, the 'disciples' are ordinary Christians, then certain consequences follow as far as the doctrine of inspiration is concerned. 1 Corinthians 12:13 is quoted as a case of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit which is relevant to Scripture. But this means that His inspiration of Scripture is no different from His activity in engendering believing confession, because 1 Corinthians 12:3 refers to the declaration that 'Jesus is Lord'. This weakens the uniqueness of Scripture as God's verbalised expression of His mind and will in all its parts. 'Jesus is Lord' is our witness; Scripture is God's own

witness. Inspiration cannot be reduced to 'the guidance of the Holy Spirit' as Montreal declares.

3 Scripture and Authority

This subject is more difficult to apprehend with confidence for no precise answer is given to the question, 'What is the ultimate authority?' The clearest statement is that Scripture is 'regarded as the written prophetic and apostolic testimony to God's act in Christ, whose authority we all accept'. But this does not help us.

Furthermore, the use of the very formal word *canonisation* in Paragraph 42 conveys the notion of the church bestowing something on the books of the two Testaments. What actually happened was that the church declared what books possessed authority in themselves. This notion of canonisation locates the Bible within the church in such a way that it cannot be really above the church. The influence of the Orthodox is visible here again. What is being argued in this chapter is not that the Bible is alone, but that it is alone supreme. It needs to be stated that, though the Church existed before the Bible was complete, the Church from Sinai onwards was never without a partial and growing Bible. In addition, revelation was given orally before it was actually recorded, so God's people have *always* been under His Word.

Tradition and Traditions

Paragraph 39 shows the influence of the N American working group in which there are what are termed 'working definitions of hinge words'.³² The members of this working group were church historians and they came from the various church groupings within the WCC. As a result, they were well aware of the complexities of their assignment. One of the difficulties they encountered was that the terminology, with which they were forced to work... had neither a single nor a generally acceptable meaning for all concerned. These terms also had polemical associations because of past controversies. That is why these 'working definitions' emerged and they are essential for an understanding of the Montreal Statement and subsequent ecumenical theology.

There is precise agreement between DEI VERBUM and Montreal in the meanings they assign to 'The Tradition' and 'traditions' but there is a possible difference between them in their understanding of 'tradition'.

We will now consider what is said in the Montreal Statement about each of these elements — 'The Tradition', 'tradition' and 'traditions' — and by so doing, throw into relief the nature of the crisis it had to face. We shall then examine some solutions offered to it.

1 'The Tradition'

The authors of the N American report, which lies behind the Montreal Statement, make the revealing comment that this expression caused them grave difficulty. The reason they stated as follows, 'There is a doubt as to its proper use in critical historical parlance'.³³ This means that it is a fabricated term with no history worth mentioning! Those who adopted it justify what

they have done by saying it provides 'some sort of referent to which the plural traditions refer if they can be rightly classed as mutually related to each other'. This, of course, begs the question as to whether all traditions are or can be rightly related — a point assumed here but denied later where some traditions are deemed to be false. This expression, 'The Tradition', serves a purpose without corresponding to any reality. It is functional and aims to turn a theory into a truth. It is ecumenical newspeak. Well might the framers of the report be hesitant about it!

But they adopted it, and so did Montreal. It has, therefore, passed into ecumenism. And what is worse, this has been done in spite of the known fact that 'The Tradition' as a term means different things to those who use it. It can mean 'the act of God in Christ', 'the work of the Spirit in salvation', 'the life of God in the Church', 'the Christian faith', 'the Holy Scriptures' and so on. To adopt a term which means different things to different people is an advantage only to those who are keen to outstrip Humpty Dumpty, who, when he used a word, used it to mean what *he* chose it to mean. In this report, one word is a conglomerate, meaning... perhaps everything. This is desperate and makes for confusion. Whatever the origin of the expression 'The Tradition', it is certainly not biblical. What is more, it is not Protestant. It is located in the direction of Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

One section of the Conference proposed the following statement, 'We can say that we exist as Christians *sola traditione*, by tradition alone'. This sentiment was shared by Protestant and Roman Catholic, but the statement was not approved for fear of its being misunderstood and offending those who upheld *sola scriptura*.³⁴

What is claimed for 'The Tradition' in the Montreal Report is that *it cannot err*.

2 'tradition'

This is the dynamic process by which 'The Tradition' is transmitted in and through the Church. Included in this process are the following, 'the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments and worship, in Christian teaching and theology, and in mission and witness to Christ by the lives of the members of the Church'.³⁵ One may note the similarity between what is included in 'tradition' and what DEI VERBUM has to say about 'Tradition'.

J P Mackay plots the broad outline of the RC view of Tradition as follows:

'They (ie RC theologians) say that the notion of Tradition has two essential elements. They call one the objective element and by that they mean to indicate the truth that is handed on. The second they call the subjective or active element and by that they indicate the process or activity of handing it on'.³⁶

For Protestants, there is a conflict between the two elements, and it is doubtful if a third element could ever be found to remove the antithesis. It lies in the frankly expressed recognition of Montreal that 'tradition can be a faithful transmission of the Gospel, but also a distortion of it'.³⁷ We read in the Montreal Report, 'the traditionary process may operate in either direction,

toward entropy or renewal'. The crux of the matter is that tradition, and its effects, traditions, is not regarded as being inevitably good, in spite of the fact that it operates in and through the church. The possibility of distortion of The Tradition, and consequent disorder is clearly envisaged. This is, of course, a testimony to the continuing influence of the Protestant Reformation and amounts to the assertion — *tradition can err*. -

3 'traditions'

This term designates the various concrete forms actually taken by the traditionary process, eg denominations, confessions, liturgies, politics, etc, etc. These 'proliferate endlessly' and 'exhibit great diversity'.³⁸ The concentration upon traditions in relation to Tradition is what distinguishes Montreal from DEI VERBUM most of all. There, reference is made to Tradition in general terms; its forms are not mentioned. F C Grant states in his response to DEI VERBUM:

'if only the Constitution had said something about the claims made for such doctrines as the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, as based upon sound tradition, it would have clarified the minds of many inquirers. And it might have started a 'dialogue' destined to open the whole question of true tradition and the tests by which extra biblical teaching should be re-evaluated'.³⁹

This is a Protestant outlook. At this point for the Roman Catholic the role of the magisterium and the idea of doctrinal development come in and the existence of the problem is denied. Protestants, however, must say, and Montreal says it, *traditions can be false*, ie not genuine.

Making such an affirmation produces a problem of great magnitude. The unavoidable question Montreal had to raise is, 'how can we distinguish between traditions embodying the true Tradition and merely human traditions? Where do we find the genuine Tradition and where impoverished tradition or even distortion of tradition'?⁴⁰

The Montreal Report provides an answer with regard to both traditions which exist and those which are likely to come into being, ie in the missionary context. The third main section deals with the latter under the heading 'The Christian Tradition and Cultural Diversity'. The emergence of false traditions is to be prevented by application of a three-fold resolve:

- a) To adhere to what is 'basic in the Old and New Testament record and interpretation' in dependence on the 'leading' of the Holy Spirit and with an awareness of God's 'providential operations'.
- b) To refuse to admit anything 'which is at variance with the good news of what God has done, is doing, and will do, in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ, as expressed in terms of the church's Christocentric and trinitarian faith.'
- c) To transmit the whole of God's truth (ie 'The Tradition in its fulness') and not to over-emphasise 'those elements which are especially congenial to a particular culture'.⁴¹

But these guidelines are vague. 'What is basic' in the Bible is not specified,

much less 'what is basic' in its interpretation. Further, the question of who decides what comes into this category, is left open.

But what of already existing traditions? How can these be evaluated? The second section of the report entitled 'the Unity of Tradition and the Diversity of Traditions' suggests that what is required is a new way of studying the histories of the various communions — a study of history which is ecumenical in its scope and spirit.⁴²

We turn to the first main section of the Montreal Statement, which is Tradition and Traditions; the need for a criterion is recognised and confessed, and an attempt is made to discover one.⁴³ It is to the New Testament that the Report turns immediately in this search, and describes it as 'an indispensable criterion'. The indefinite article is not in the original text, but we have used it to draw attention to the fact the New Testament is not regarded as sufficient by itself. The truth of this can be seen in the way the report proceeds to speak of the fact and necessity of the church's interpretation of the New Testament. To that, however, must be added the variety of such interpretations. Therefore, the criteriological problem is not only compounded by a hermeneutical one but is thereby rendered insoluble.

As a result of being unable to affirm for differing reasons that Scripture is inerrant, or that the Church (magisterium) is 'indefectible' (Küng's term), there exists no single criterion adequate for the purpose of evaluating traditions. The Montreal report then takes the position that the needed standard is composed both of Scripture and the Church. This is what the Orthodox believe and what Rome teaches. The Montreal Report has no place for the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation. This means that the Reformation challenge to Rome is equally applicable to the ecumenical movement.

It must now be made clear that the breakthrough was not made in terms of the original conflict and its basic issue. That issue was whether Holy Scripture was sufficient and clear to teach the truth and rule the Church by itself (*sola scriptura*). In the Montreal Statement that issue is not raised or addressed. The breakthrough was achieved in terms of what is being thought today about Scripture and Tradition. What is more, it has been achieved by a *deus ex machina* (ie a character invented by a playwright and introduced without warning at the end of a play to solve the problem created by the plot; it is the measure of an author's failure). The Tradition is an ecumenical *deus ex machina* of a verbal kind. It is a way of resolving the head-on clash between Holy Scripture and church tradition; it avoids the grim reality of the conflict. The Tradition includes both, and therefore gives the victory to each.

But is this what is accomplished? Does Holy Scripture come out of this reconstruction as a real victor? The use of the term 'Tradition' for the overarching concept or reality, in which Scripture is given a place, argues against this being the case. The term 'Tradition' leans in a Catholic direction and favours the church over against the Bible. It is, therefore, capable of integration with Roman Catholicism and potentially destructive of Protestantism and of Christianity itself.

THE BREACH

While, from the standpoint of ecumenism, a breakthrough was achieved at Montreal with regard to the Scripture-Tradition conflict, a breach also occurred there with the view of the Bible which had previously held sway in WCC theology. That view was not the evangelical view of the Bible. Rather, the breach which occurred at Montreal was made with the view of the Bible espoused by the Biblical Theology Movement, a twentieth-century school of thought which works on the basis of the neo-orthodox theology of Barth and Brunner. This movement, 'is marked by the combination of a critical approach to the Bible with a confessing theology, emphasising the unity of the Bible and its witness to the history of salvation.'⁴⁴

A symposium of essays, which arose out of the Wadham College conference and expounded its findings, was later published.⁴⁵ It was at the New Delhi Assembly of the WCC that this outlook on the Bible reached the peak of its influence. There, Dr Visser't Hooft, a leading exponent of this theology and General Secretary of the WCC from 1948-1966, declared that it was the Bible which gave the WCC its marching orders. The New Delhi statements repeatedly use the expression 'the biblical understanding' with reference to various subjects it considered, eg reconciliation and service.⁴⁶ It was, of course, at New Delhi that the WCC's basis of membership was enlarged to include a reference to the Scriptures as well as to the Trinity.⁴⁷ As a result it seemed that the WCC had a generally accepted view of Scripture for its base. But this was all to change at Montreal.

The collapse in the view of the Bible which has just been described was brought about by statements which were grounded on the same critical view of the Bible which the Biblical Theology Movement had never repudiated. The force of these statements could not, therefore, be denied. They had the effect of showing that the themes of salvation-history, which are thought to integrate the Bible, were not supported by biblical exegesis of a higher critical kind.

In his address at Montreal entitled 'Unity and Diversity in New Testament Ecclesiology', Ernst Käsemann exploded the notion that the New Testament taught a single view of the Church. Käsemann's thesis aroused many fears for the future of the Ecumenical Movement. 'One Church' no longer seemed an attainable goal.

Flesseman-van Leer lists the following items as consequences of the break which we have been describing:

'it seems impossible to speak univocally any more of *the* biblical message, or *the* biblical doctrine in respect of a particular issue. The importance of critical biblical scholarship was affirmed and the insight that the use of this exegetical tool had far reaching theological consequences was brought home.'⁴⁸

Given such acknowledgement of diversity in the Bible, the questions of its interpretation and authority were inevitably raised. These have been the main subjects on Faith and Order Conference agenda ever since Montreal. Interpretation was dealt with at Bristol in 1967 and authority at Louvain in

1971. A particular nexus of these themes was dealt with at Bangalore in 1977, namely, the relation between the two Testaments. We will survey these briefly and see where the Ecumenical Movement is going with regard to the Bible.

Interpretation

The powerful influence which confessional traditions exerted on member churches as they sought to interpret Scripture was recognised at Montreal. In addition, different 'keys' were used by the churches in their interpretative study — for example, the analogy of faith, the 'centre' of Scripture, the individual conscience, the mind of the church, the deposit of faith and the magisterium. These differences in methodology were bound to lead to diversity of conclusions so the Montreal Report raised the question, 'How can we overcome the situation in which we all read Scripture in the light of our own traditions?' The answer given is that the Tradition should be sought by *corporate* study of the Bible and study of the Fathers of all periods of the Church's history but 'in the light of the ecumenical task.'⁴⁹ Clearly, there is an ongoing search for an ecumenical hermeneutic to match ecumenical historiography! The result is unlikely to be the hearing of the authentic Word of God.

Other influences are being brought to bear on the hermeneutical enterprise beside the ecumenical one. Two of these call for notice and comment.

1 The Human Character of Scripture

The first of these is the almost total preoccupation with the humanness of Scripture. Evangelicals have always doubted whether the divine character of Scripture was being properly acknowledged in ecumenical theology, in spite of the many references to its being the Word of God. Now, however, the pendulum is very definitely at the other extreme.

An influential figure in the discussions at Bristol and Louvain was James Barr. He analysed and summarised the findings of study groups set up following Montreal, and these were incorporated in the report presented at the Bristol Conference. Barr performed the same sort of task for a consultation on authority set up after Bristol for the conference at Louvain. Barr's view of Scripture is well-known and includes the frank admission of error in Scripture as a necessary part of its humanness. He locates the authority of Scripture in its role or function rather than in its character. These views are expressed in the statements approved by the Bristol and Louvain Conferences.

2 Diversity within Scripture

The second influence concerns the diversity present in the Bible which brings its human character to a sharp focus. What is the nature of this diversity? Has not diversity always been regarded as a characteristic of the biblical record? If by diversity no more is meant than a striking and rich variety, then that is true. But more is meant. The Bristol report entitled **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEM FOR THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT** declares, 'the Bible contains a collection of very diverse literary traditions, the contents of which often stand in tension with one another.'⁵¹

What kind of tensions is this? While admitting that some differences may be 'complementary aspects of the truth', the report states, 'sometimes, as far as we can see, there may be real contradictions... Such diversities and contradictions should not be glossed over... and it is essential that forced harmonisation should be avoided.' Examples of such contradictions are given — the concept of providence in the Chronicles and the book of Job and the way in which the future of Israel is conceived in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 and Romans 11:25ff. Even Christological statements in the New Testament are sometimes in tension, eg Romans 1:3ff and Matthew 1:18ff and John 1:1f.⁵²

Although the report recognises such admissions have a knock-on effect for the authority of the Bible, there does not seem to be any concern... Barr even talks openly about 'a possibly basic theological disagreement'⁵³ existing in the Bible. By 'basic' is meant what the Bristol report refers to as 'real theological disagreements within the Biblical period itself.' Such disagreements are to be found in the earliest form of the written text. This means there is no hope of peeling away layers of tradition which interpret an earlier form of the text so as to arrive at a text free of contradictions. *This is most serious*; it is to enthrone contradiction in the place of consistency and to deny that unity of truth is to be found in Holy Scripture. Given such a view, what hope can there be for unity in truth in the Church?

However, ecumenists see real gain in viewing Scripture in this way because it immediately has the effect of reducing the grim reality of their own divided state. Instead of viewing their divisions as something to be overcome by resolution, it is now possible to see them in the Bible. The diversity of the churches is rooted in the diversity of Scripture. The Bristol report says:

'the diversity of thought within the Bible reflects the diversity of God's actions in different historical situations and the diversity of human response to God's actions... There is a diversity of church traditions which in some of its aspects may be related to that diversity of traditions already found in the Bible'.⁵⁴

Towards the end of the report, we read:

'the awareness of the differences within the Bible will lead us towards a deeper understanding of our divisions and will help us to interpret them more readily as possible and legitimate interpretations of one and the same Gospel'.⁵⁵

More seriously, of course, Scripture loses its independent status and critical role over the church. How can Scripture possibly function as a theological criterion when it is itself theologically contradictory? If Scripture legitimises the diversity in churches, how can real unity be achieved? Even more seriously, how can the real truth be known?

Authority

One's view of the Bible has inevitable consequences for one's view of its authority. This was acknowledged in the Bristol Conference and so the subject was delegated to its successor.

James Barr acknowledges the possible need to make 'a choice within the

totality of the Bible'⁵⁶ in order that theological interpretation might proceed. This means at least excluding some biblical material from consideration. But who will make such a choice? And on what basis? Excluding Scripture alone, the only options are an ecumenical council, an infallible pope or magisterium or a consensus among biblical scholars. Infallibility is an inescapable concept. The debate is over where it is to be located and how it is to be described. In other words, is infallibility the mark of the Bible, the church or tradition?

What did Louvain have to say on the 'authority of the Bible'? We must draw attention to two matters:

1 The extent of the Canon

This question had not previously been faced by the Faith and Order Movement but, following the Bristol Conference, James Barr noted that attention needed to be given to it because disagreement existed over what should be interpreted. While some regarded the biblical books as a basic source, others saw them only as one expression among others of Christian truth. The delegates at Louvain decided to extend whatever authority biblical books possess to other literature.⁵⁷ Apocryphal literature is bracketed with biblical writings but Louvain concedes that the church recognises the Bible as special. But which church is referred to? And whose Bible? The Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches disagree over the extent of the canon. In opening the canon, Louvain had taken a further step in the direction of weakening the Scripture.

2 The kind of authority

In October 1968, a Faith and Order consultation was held at Böldern near Zürich; it reflected on the Bristol Conference and did preparatory work for Louvain. Its findings and suggestions were summarised by James Barr. The consultation recommended that, in future, any consideration of the authority of the Bible should be approached

*'not by a directly dogmatic method and not by a general consideration of biblical authority abstracted from the exegetical situation, but by the interpretation of particular biblical passages in their relation to a chosen theme.'*⁵⁸

They clearly outlaw the infallible authority of the Bible as an ecumenical option and all the interesting theological questions listed for study are to be considered from within the framework of the Bible's diversity as defined. The scales are loaded.

What is Louvain's view of the Bible's authority? There is no single, straightforward answer but three elements in the answer can be mentioned. The first is that the Bible has 'a certain weight as a literary document'. The second is that it is 'the oldest documentation of the apostolic message' and, as such, it is an unavoidable point of reference of some kind for the church. It is the third which states the distinctive view of authority for which Louvain is known, namely, that the authority of the Bible is a 'relational concept'.⁵⁹ What is meant by this is unfolded in these words, 'when we speak of the "authority" of the Bible in the strict sense we mean that it makes the Word of God audible

and is therefore able to lead men to faith.⁶⁰

The Bible does make its authority felt in this way but what is troubling is that the authority of the Bible should be defined primarily in this way. This statement raises the question of whether the Bible's authority cannot be defined in relation to itself, ie what it *is*, as distinct from what it *does*. Louvain adopts this functional view of authority. It is, in fact, no longer possible or even acceptable in ecumenism to speak of the Bible, its inspiration and authority, as a thing *by itself*. Some connection is always to be made, it seems, between the Bible and the church, or between the Bible and the individual in terms of recognition and interpretation. In practice, therefore, the Bible will not be given its place and role as the supra-human and supra-ecclesiastical Word of God.

It is, of course, the experiencing of the Bible's message as applied by the Holy Spirit which leads one to believe that it is the Word of God. But there lies an important point of theological distinction. This concerns the difference between *what the Bible is* and *how it is perceived to be what it is*. That distinction has been erased by this report if it was ever considered and, as a result, it has become impossible to speak of the Bible apart from the individual believer or the church.

Conclusion

We have been describing a struggle — a struggle between church (ecumenism) and Bible. Vatican II was at great pains to give something more to the Bible in terms of prominence vis-à-vis the church than had formerly appeared to be the case. The Montreal delegates, who consisted of those who were neither Roman Catholics nor Eastern Orthodox, were anxious to speak more positively about the church vis-à-vis the Bible than had been done before. The preceding pages indicate something of the difficulties they all encountered — and, of course, the story has not ended.

But a point has been reached where evangelicals can take stock. How has the Bible fared in all this? There is only one answer possible for an evangelical to give to that question. It is that the Bible has lost out — and lost out to the church.

When 'The Tradition' terminology was adopted at Montreal, Scripture became totally 'ecclesiasticised', ie it was brought within the orbit of the church. As a result, it became notionally impossible for the Bible ever to be detached from the church so as to be above her, and practically impossible for the Bible to be regarded in that way so that it might be the supreme judge of the church in all her affairs. Yet the magisterium of the RC church and the 'Christ in the Church' of the Eastern Orthodox churches remained intact.

When the relational view of inspiration and authority became accepted, the Bible became thoroughly 'humanised'. It became a human record about God, errant in parts, which was to be evaluated and endorsed by human beings and interpreted by them. But even in these areas the church is involved, for such activities properly take place only in the church and by the Spirit in the church.

That the Holy Spirit could be opposed to ecumenism is as impossible as Holy Scripture being so. The Bible has become first and last 'the document of the faith of the church'⁶¹ and is no longer in reality 'the revealed, inspired and inerrant Word of God.'

The church has emasculated the Bible. *Sola ecclesia* or *sola traditione* has replaced *sola scriptura*.

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