

Baptists

and

UNITY.

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR CHURCH RELATIONS

The Officers of the Baptist Union.

Two College Principals appointed by the Principals and Staffs Conference:
Rev. G. R. Beasley-Murray, M.A., B.D., M.Th., Ph.D., D.D. (Chairman)
Rev. L. G. Champion, B.A., B.D., D.Th.

Two General Superintendents appointed by the Superintendents' Board:
Rev. William Davies, B.A.
Rev. W. J. Grant, M.A.

Three ministers and four laymen elected by the Council:
Rev. R. L. Child, M.A., B.D., B.Litt.*
Rev. A. S. Clement, B.A., B.D.
Rev. W. M. S. West, M.A., D.Theol.

Mr. H. F. Gale
Mr. E. E. Ironmonger, M.Sc.
Mr. J. G. LeQuesne, Q.C., M.A.
Miss M. Russell

*Unable to attend during the discussions.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference of this particular study are embodied in Minutes of the Council of November 1964, and March, 1965. The first agreed to refer the matter of the recommendations made at the Nottingham Conference on Faith and Order, September 1964, to the Advisory Committee for Church Relations.

The Advisory Committee for Church Relations drew up an interim reply which the Council considered in March 1965, and urged the Advisory Committee to begin to prepare a comprehensive statement for the guidance of the churches.

INTRODUCTION

1. This report owes its origin to the Nottingham Conference on Faith and Order, held in September, 1964, under the auspices of the British Council of Churches. This Conference was the first of its kind to be held by the British Churches and was specifically directed to the Church situation in the British Isles. The phrase "One church renewed for mission", the title of one of the preparatory booklets, proved an influence and impetus throughout the discussions. Their character and conclusions must be seen, however, in relation to the Faith and Order discussions of the past forty years, the Ecumenical Movement in general, and the conversations and negotiations between particular Churches which are currently in progress.

2. There were at Nottingham 28 Baptists connected with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland (12 of them members of the Baptist Union Council), 3 members of the Baptist Union of Scotland and 2 members of the Baptist Union of Wales. Only one of the 25 sub-sections into which the Conference was divided for the purpose of discussion was without a Baptist participant.

3. The accounts given by those present at Nottingham, and the printed report *Unity Begins at Home*, leave no doubt that the Conference was a very significant occasion and that the challenging series of resolutions was the result of a strongly emerging consensus of opinion, to which the periods of worship and the Bible study made important contributions (for the Resolutions see Appendix).

4. The Advisory Committee on Church Relations believes it to be vital that the resolutions and what lies behind them be sympathetically considered not only by the Baptist Union Council but also by the denomination as a whole. Baptists are required at this juncture to give clearer indication than they have so far done as to their attitude to some of the major questions, theological and practical, involved in the movement for greater unity among the Christians of this and other lands. That there are considerable divergencies of view among Baptists makes it the more important that they study and face together the questions raised at Nottingham. The present report was prepared and is issued on the instructions of the Baptist Union Council after Associations, churches and ministers' fraternal had the opportunity of commenting on an interim statement prepared by this committee and approved by the Council of the Baptist Union in March, 1965.*

*Comments were received from 16 Associations, 11 churches and 13 fraternal.

5. The contemporary pressures for new corporate as well as individual relationships between those of different traditions and denominations compel Baptists, no less than other Christians, to face and formulate more clearly:

- (1) their theology of the Church and its unity.
- (2) their attitude to and relationship with their fellow Baptists and with other Christian communities both in Britain and overseas.

This must be done in the light of Baptist history and experience, but also with the expectation that God will break forth more light and truth from His word, as we believe He did in the 17th century. There are many new challenges to Christian witness in modern Britain. Economic, social and technological changes affect the Churches, as they did in ancient times, in the Middle Ages and in the days of Luther and Calvin, of Wesley and Carey. A wise response to the resolutions of the Nottingham Conference—and more important—a discerning attitude to the transformation which has come in Church Relations during recent decades and a more adequate fulfilment of God's purpose for His People in this generation, are only likely where clarity of thought and conviction are joined with open-mindedness and sympathy towards those whose principles and practice are different from our own, and where there is earnest prayer and a desire to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I

BRITISH BAPTISTS AND THEIR DENOMINATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Baptists have repeatedly asserted—as have many other Christian communities—that they seek to base their doctrine and practice on the Scriptures.* A later chapter of this report is devoted to "Biblical and Theological Principles concerning the Unity of the Church". Its conclusion is that "the visible unity of Christ's Church is a concept rooted in the New Testament", but it is recognised that "opinions differ as to how the Church's unity is to be known and expressed". There are differences on this matter among Baptists. It has seemed well, therefore, briefly to indicate early in this report, for the benefit of both Baptists and those of other traditions who may read it, something of the present denominational situation and the present relationship of Baptist groups to one another and to other Christians in this and other parts of the world.

There are nearly 3,300 Baptist churches in Britain with church rolls giving a total membership of some 295,000 persons. The total community associated with these churches is probably about 750,000. Of the 3,300 churches 2,100 are in England, 900 in Wales, 160 in Scotland and 76 in Northern Ireland or Eire. 2,218 of these churches are directly in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland (formed in 1812-13). Almost all of these are in England. Over 300 are in Wales or Monmouthshire, however, and thirteen Welsh Associations (that is county or regional fellowships of churches) are, as such, in membership with the Union and represented, like the English Associations, on its Council. A dozen Scottish churches are in direct membership with the Union. Separate Baptist Unions were formed in Wales in 1866 and in Scotland in 1869; both are closely linked in a number of ways with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. The Baptist Union of Ireland, whose 76 churches have in all some 6,400 members, is of more recent formation; it has little direct contact or fellowship with the other Baptist Unions, though some support is given to the Baptist Missionary Society as well as to an Irish Baptist Mission in South America.

The tangled relationships which result from the above facts are in

*e.g. Henry Cook, *What Baptists stand for*, 1947, Ch. 1, "The Supremacy of Scripture".
E. A. Payne, "Our Appeal to the Scriptures", *10th B.W. Congress*, 1960, pp. 111-115.

many respects illogical. They are the legacy of history. They are confusing and are frequently misunderstood within as well as outside the Baptist community.

There are in England a number of local churches describing themselves as Strict and Particular Baptist, which are not in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. They remain emphatically Calvinistic in their theology and restrict their membership and their Communion Service to those who have been baptized on a personal profession of faith.* The total membership of these churches is between 15,000 and 16,000. Apart from the rights which certain of them have to benefit from the Particular Baptist Fund (founded in 1717) and co-operation in and after World War II on war damage matters, these churches have few formal links with other Baptists.

There are also a few independent Baptist churches, some of which have joined the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches.

All the Baptists of England, Scotland and Wales, save those in the Strict Baptist or independent Baptist churches are officially linked to the Baptist World Alliance, formed in London in 1905 and now drawing together Baptist Unions and Conventions in some 70 countries with a total membership of over 27,000,000, which probably represents a community strength at least 3 times that number. The Baptist World Alliance is more loosely organised than some of the other World Confessional bodies. It "may in no way interfere with the independence of the churches or assume the administrative functions of existing organisations", but has of recent years begun to take more seriously its function to "serve as an agency for propagating Baptist principles and tenets of faith, objectives, and distinctive principles throughout the world". Its officers have taken advantage of the opportunity to send a fraternal delegate to the meetings of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, and have shared in the consultations between representatives of the World Confessional bodies arranged by the World Council of Churches**, but the critical attitude of certain of the Unions, notably the Southern Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. (which has nearly 11,000,000 members), has prevented whole-hearted co-operation with any of the main ecumenical agencies. In approaching the problems of Church Relations in Britain, British Baptists cannot but have at the back of their minds questions as to the possible effect of any substantial changes in their relations with the Baptist World Alliance and Baptists overseas. An awareness of their strength as a world-wide community has been built

*Some Strict Baptist churches restrict table fellowship to those of their own communion.

**At a meeting in Geneva in October 1966 a 'Confessional Group' was formally constituted with a chairman and a secretary. The General Secretary and Associate Secretary of the B.W.A. were present.

up only slowly. At the same time it would be contrary to the Baptist emphasis on freedom of conscience for one Union to bind the action of another or for an organisation like the Baptist World Alliance to play a decisive part in the affairs of any one member or country.*

British Baptists have especially close ties with the Baptists of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, so many of whom were originally emigrants from Britain. There are special relations, too, between British Baptists generally and Unions of Baptist churches in Asia (India, Pakistan and Ceylon), Africa (Congo and Angola) and the West Indies, which owe their origin under God to the activities of the Baptist Missionary Society. It is important to note the way in which certain of these Unions have developed. In some areas, as in parts of Congo and in the Lushai Hills of Assam, Baptists have developed a pattern of churchmanship more presbyterian than the congregational pattern familiar in this country.

British Baptists have also historically and now through the European Baptist Federation close contacts with a number of the Baptist communities on the continent of Europe. Several of these have organisations far more centralised and authoritarian in character than those in Britain. In Germany the Baptists, whose history dates from 1834 are now part of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches, of which Plymouth Brethren and Darbyists are also members. In the U.S.S.R. the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists, with 540,000 members, includes those formerly styled Evangelical Christians, the Baptists and a number of Mennonites and Pentecostals.

From the 1920's the Baptists of North China, many of them linked with British Baptists through the Baptist Missionary Society, were part of a federation of non-episcopal churches known as the Church of Christ in China. Some, but not all the Baptists of Japan have been members of a united Church. Of recent years Baptists in North India and Pakistan and in Ceylon,** connected with the Baptist Missionary Society, have joined in formal discussions on specific plans for United Churches which are expected to be episcopal in character and to recognise both believer's and sponsored baptism. In Orissa there has been fruitful co-operation in mission between British Baptists and the United Christian Missionary Society (Disciples of Christ)*** of the U.S.A. A few years ago Canadian

*Cf. the discussions and consultations instigated and shared in by representatives of the East Asian Christian Council in Bangalore, 1961, Geneva 1963, Bangkok 1964 and Geneva 1965; and the World Methodist Conference held in London in 1966, where one of the main issues proved to be the place of a world confessional movement in a Christendom increasingly dominated by ecumenism.

**Those in N. India and Ceylon are still involved in discussions. Baptists in E. Pakistan have withdrawn, having decided it would be better for them first to seek closer relations with other Baptist groups in that country.

***The body known in this country as Churches of Christ. See p.23.

Baptists and Lutherans held discussions with representatives of the Church of South India on the possibility of closer relations, but the discussions proved abortive.

The American Baptist Convention, which has had more than once abortive conversations about the possibility of union with the Disciples of Christ, from 1963—1965 sent two "observer-consultants" to the meetings of the "Consultation on Church Union" sponsored by the National Council of Churches on the basis of proposals put forward by Dr. Eugene Carson Blake and Bishop James A. Pike. Six denominations have been full participants; seventeen others have sent "observer-consultants". At its meeting in February 1966 the Convention's General Council declined an invitation to full participant status.* This decision was endorsed at the full Convention meeting in May, but the continuance of observer status was approved.

This rapid and necessarily incomplete survey of the situation throughout the world will be seen to bear inescapably and rightly upon the issues facing British Baptists which are the special concern of this report.

The problems connected with Church Relations and Christian Unity are not the same within the areas of the four Baptist Unions of the British Isles. In Wales there is now no established Church. The various Free Churches are numerically strong and conversations have recently been in progress between Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists with the object of finding the way to a United Church of Wales.** The Welsh Assembly of the Baptist Union of Wales, at its meeting in September 1966, declared the scheme as at present drafted impracticable in the near future, but urged co-operation in every possible way with the other Churches, and the continuance of discussions with them.

In Scotland the established Church is Presbyterian in doctrine and polity and the establishment is very different in character from that in England, the spiritual autonomy of the Church of Scotland being clearly insisted on. The Baptist churches of Scotland, with some 18,500 members, do not find it easy to have close corporate relations with the other Christian

*See *The Relationship of the American Baptist Convention to the Consultation on Church Union*, 1966. The Convention has now set up a Division of Co-operative Christianity and has appointed as full-time executive director, Dr. Robert G. Torbet, formerly dean and professor of Church History at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City. Dr. Torbet will also serve as the staff member of a Commission on Christian Unity, which is authorised to enter upon preliminary exploration of conversations with Roman Catholics. He is a past president of the Convention, and the author of the standard American *History of the Baptists*.

**See *Toward Union: A suggested Scheme for Church Union in Wales*. 1963, and *A Scheme of Union: The United Church of Wales*. 1965. The Scheme does not include the (Anglican) Church of Wales or Roman Catholics, but the conversations have become more complicated because of conversations elsewhere between Methodists and Anglicans, Presbyterians and Anglicans, and Presbyterians and Congregationalists.

churches of the country and though in membership with the Scottish Council of Churches declined in 1965 an invitation to join a special consultation on the Nottingham resolutions. Irish Baptists, as well as being few in numbers, have the added difficulty of covering two States, the one predominantly Roman Catholic, the other (in which all but six of the Baptist churches are found) predominantly Presbyterian.

The Nottingham resolutions inevitably challenge in particular the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland and the churches and Associations in membership with it.

II

PAST AND PRESENT ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland is in membership with the Free Church Federal Council, the British Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

British Baptists had a leading part in the establishment at the end of the 19th century of the National Free Church Council and local Free Church Councils. The Federal Council of Evangelical Free Churches, established in 1919, was in large measure the creation of the then Secretary of the Baptist Union, Dr. J. H. Shakespeare. The uniting of the two bodies in 1939 into the Free Church Federal Council owed much to Baptist leadership and pressure.

Baptists and Congregationalists share a largely common tradition and history.* Both bodies were deeply influenced by John Bunyan and especially by his claim that "differences of judgment about water baptism" should be "no bar to communion", that is, to local church fellowships including together those baptized in infancy and those baptized as believers, provided all applicants for membership convinced the church meeting of the genuineness and quality of their Christian life. Bunyan's direct continuing influence is to be seen in the Bedfordshire Union of Baptist and Congregational Churches. His attitude was opposed by certain of his fellow Baptists in his own life-time.

There developed both in the 17th and 18th centuries controversies among Baptists on what should be the "terms" or conditions on which Christians should be admitted to the Lord's Table. In the 19th century first the Table and then membership were "opened" to other than baptized believers in an increasing number of local Baptist churches. This was not the result of any officially decreed policy, but of the gradual conviction of local congregations that these steps were right. The process was aided by the breaking down of denominational barriers as a result of the Evangelical Revival, by the rapid growth in population and by marriages between those of different Christian traditions.** By the end of the 19th

*See E. A. Payne, *Free Churchmen Unrepentant and Repentant*, pp. 93-104.

**No attempt has ever been made to ascertain how many churches in membership with the Baptist Union confine their membership to those baptized on profession of faith, how many have an "open" membership.

century Methodists and English Presbyterians, having shared in the long-drawn out struggle for full civil rights for Nonconformists, joined with Congregationalists and Baptists in the Free Church Council movement. Together they began to look forward to the establishment of a United Free Church.*

Early in the 20th century Baptists and Congregationalists joined in forming a number of "Union Churches", affiliated to both their Unions and practising both believer's and infant baptism, served by ministers of one or other denomination. The Free Churches in Letchworth (1905), Amersham-on-the-Hill (1908), Hampstead Garden Suburb (1910) and Hutton and Shenfield (1913) are of this kind.**

The Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches was regarded by its founders as a necessary step towards a United Free Church.*** It had hardly been formed, however, before the effects of World War I and the "Appeal to all Christian People" issued by the Bishops of the Anglican Church from the Lambeth Conference of 1920 brought new currents into the already restless sea of Christian relationships.

Individual Anglicans and Nonconformists ready to accept its doctrinal basis had been linked in the Evangelical Alliance, formed in 1846. Various schemes for a more comprehensive Church of England were put forward by individuals in the mid-19th century. The first official attempt to clarify the attitudes of the various denominations to one another was taken by the Church of England. In 1888 the Archbishop of Canterbury invited other Churches to consider the possibility of corporate reunion or "such relations as may prepare the way for fuller organic unity hereafter" on the basis of four "Articles", now generally known as the "Lambeth Quadrilateral". These were the Holy Scriptures as "containing all things necessary to salvation" and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith; the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith (with the Apostles' Creed as a satisfactory baptismal symbol); the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and the Historic Episcopate "locally adapted in the methods of its administration".

The Baptist Union Assembly in 1889 welcomed the growing desire

*See E. K. H. Jordan, *Free Church Unity*, 1956.

**These churches have not always found it easy to maintain a double allegiance, in spite of their relative strength. Considerable discussion took place in the 1930's and again early in the 1950's about the possibility and desirability of the establishment of further churches of this kind, but the discussions proved inconclusive at the official level. Little has resulted at the local level until quite recently when a Union church was established on a new estate at Ramsgate, and in Bristol and Arundel Baptist and Congregationalist churches united.

***"A Declaratory Statement of Common Faith and Practice" was drawn up in 1917, accepted by the Baptist Union Assembly in 1918. It was re-affirmed when the Free Church Federal Council was constituted in 1940.

for unity manifested by this approach and the first of the four Articles, but felt that the terms of the other three were so ambiguous as to make a profitable issue to any deliberations based on them unlikely. Christianity, it declared, is essentially a spiritual, personal and non-sacerdotal religion; a profession of faith is the necessary pre-requisite of baptism; and the internal government of the Church should be conducted by professed believers, and in no way controlled by the State.*

Baptists were present at the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, from which the Ecumenical Movement received much of its early inspiration and impetus. They rejoiced to see in it a fulfilment of a project William Carey had mooted more than a century before.**

Early in 1914 the Baptist Union Council expressed its willingness to participate in a proposed World Faith and Order Conference. The Union was represented at a series of unofficial Anglican-Free Church Conferences held in Oxford, between 1918 and 1920. These encouraged some Free Churchmen to hope that reunion with the Church of England might be possible without any surrender of their principles.

The Appeal to All Christian People, issued by the Lambeth Conference of 1920, marked a new stage in Church Relations. The bishops, with the Christian traditions of both East and West in mind, stated their belief that "the visible unity of the Church will be found to involve the whole-hearted acceptance" of the Scriptures, the Creeds, the two Sacraments and "a ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ, and the authority of the whole body"—an important re-phrasing of the earlier reference to the "Historic Episcopate". It was clear, however, from joint conferences held between 1921 and 1925 in response to the Appeal that Anglicans would regard a direct link with the episcopal succession of the past as essential to a united Church. Despite the acknowledgment that Free Church ministries are "real ministries of Christ's Word and Sacraments in the Universal Church", the Anglican representatives hoped that Free Church ministers would submit to some kind of conditional episcopal ordination.***

The Baptist reply to the Lambeth Appeal was adopted by the Annual Assembly in 1926. It pointed out that the attitude of Baptists to the issues raised was determined by their understanding of the Church as a holy society of believers under Christ's sole lordship, found wherever com-

*See E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union. A Short History*. App. VII.

**See S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey*, 1936, p.268; Ruth Rouse and S. C. Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517—1948*, 1954, p.355.

***Dr. J. H. Shakespeare had already indicated in *The Churches at the Cross Roads*, 1918, that he would himself be ready to accept such conditional re-ordination. Dr. John Clifford and Dr. T. R. Glover were among the Baptist leaders who made clear they disagreed with him on this matter.

panies of believers unite as churches on the ground of a confession of personal faith. Each local company thus constituted is enabled and responsible for self-government through Christ's indwelling Spirit. It has the responsibility and liberty under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to interpret for itself Christ's laws as revealed in the Scriptures, though never out of relation to other Christians. Clearly it would be impossible to accept the suggestion that the commission to ministerial office and the grace of Christ in the Lord's Supper depend on episcopal ordination.

When the conversations between representatives of the Federal Council and the Church of England were temporarily suspended in 1925, renewed interest was taken in the possibility of certain of the Free Churches uniting. In 1932 "A plea for unity between Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians" was issued by thirty well-known Free Church ministers, eighteen of whom were Baptists.* The Baptist Union Council appointed a special committee under the chairmanship of Mr. C. T. Le Quesne, K.C., to consider the "Plea" and its report appeared in 1937. Because members of the committee were found to hold widely divergent views on the relation of baptism to the Lord's Supper and to church membership, they were unable to speak with a united voice. Some were prepared for a United Free Church, provided Baptists were free to maintain their distinctive witness regarding baptism. A majority doubted whether such witness would be satisfactorily maintained. "All agreed that, if this question of union with Congregationalists and Presbyterians were forced to an issue in England now, it would split our denomination" (Report, p.36). Moreover the committee were advised by Dr. Rushbrooke, then Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, that in his view a union of Baptists and Paedobaptists in Britain would endanger and might destroy the world-unity of Baptists as expressed in the Alliance.

General Free Church Union has not been seriously discussed officially since the 1930's, though in 1956 a commission of the Free Church Federal Council presented proposals which, it was urged, might lead to "fuller realisation of the unity" and "more adventurous co-operation" by the constituent Churches. The suggestions were (a) a complete and mutual recognition of one another's churchmanship, (b) freedom of transfer of all in full membership from one church to another, (c) common access of all members to the Lord's Table, (d) full and mutual recognition of the accredited ministers of each denomination, and (e) supplementary membership enabling those in membership with a church of another denomination to retain links with their former denomination and continue to support its work. These proposals met with general though guarded approval by

*A further eighteen names were added to the original group and these included the Treasurer of the Baptist Union (Mr. Herbert Marnham), three other leading laymen, and Dr. Charles Brown, one of the oldest and most respected of the ex-Presidents of the Union.

the Baptist Union Council. They have long been given practical expression by many Baptist churches, but would not be acceptable to all.

In the last two or three decades a number of new developments have given both greater breadth and depth to the problem of Church Relations. Reference will later be made to the conversations between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, between Methodists and Anglicans and between Scottish Presbyterians and Anglicans.

A second series of Anglican-Free Church Conversations took place during the 1930's, but for various reasons were not conducted with the same seriousness and care as the earlier ones. Some of those engaged in the discussions issued in 1938 the *Outline of a Reunion Scheme between the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches of England*.^{*} The proposals included a representative and constitutional episcopate (implying no particular doctrine of episcopacy), combined with congregational and presbyterial elements. Both infant and believers' baptism were recognised, in the case of those baptized in infancy a profession of faith sealed in a public service of confirmation being required for communicant status. In its *Statement on Christian Reunion*, sent to the Federal Council in 1938 the Baptist Union Council declared itself unable to accept infant baptism as an alternative form of admission into the Church, or to regard ordination as conferring a priesthood other than that already possessed by all believers. Significantly, however, it stated that it did not regard the congregational form of church government, though "expressing important elements in the life of the truly Christian society", as "essential to the constitution of the Church". The members of the Baptist Union Council were said to be "prepared to consider any change of order in Baptist Church polity which would increase the efficiency of the Church by helping to make it a truer fellowship of the Holy Spirit", but doubted whether ambiguity as to the meaning of episcopal ordination would provide a sure foundation for organic union.^{**}

The Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1946, invited the Free Churches to take episcopacy into their own systems and try it out on their own ground, as a stage towards full communion with the Anglican Church. This suggestion was more fully expounded by an officially appointed group of Anglicans and Free Churchmen in the document *Church Relations in England* (1951). A statement by the Baptist Union Council, in 1953,^{***} explained that Baptists considered it fundamentally wrong to make intercommunion dependent on episcopacy, particularly in view of the unsubstantiated claims commonly made for the latter. To insist that one

particular person, by virtue of his office, take part in an ordination or the admission of new members would be to introduce a new and alien element into Baptist life. Moreover, to have two types of ministers, one episcopally ordained and one not, even for a short period, would lead to an intolerable situation.

By this time the British Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches had been formed, and with both British Baptists were associated. The inaugural meeting of the British Council of Churches was held in 1942 in the Baptist Church House. The British Council of Churches has become an increasingly useful and influential agency for common activities and witness in the fields of international and social affairs, education and Christian Aid. Until the Nottingham Conference it did not seriously challenge the British Churches on matters of Faith and Order. Rec

The involvement of British Baptists in the steps leading up to the formation of the World Council of Churches can be traced back to 1914 when the Baptist Union Council expressed its willingness to participate in a proposed World Faith and Order Conference. This was delayed by World War I, and when the Conference met at last in 1927 in Lausanne there were no official Baptist Union delegates.^{*} Baptist interest had been more easily awakened in the Universal Christian Conference of Life and Work which met in Stockholm in 1925. The failure to be officially represented at Lausanne was soon felt to be a mistake and strong delegations were sent in 1937 to the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State and to the Edinburgh Faith and Order Conference; at both the Southern Baptist Convention was also represented. The drawing together of the two streams of Christian discussion and collaboration—"Life and Work" and "Faith and Order"—was then felt to be essential. The then Secretary of the Baptist Union (Rev. M. E. Aubrey) was appointed to the committee charged with the drafting of a scheme for a World Council of Churches and also played an important part following World War II in "Christian Reconstruction in Europe", out of which came Christian Aid. At every stage the Baptist Union Council reported its decisions and actions to the Annual Assembly. Full details will be found in the Annual Reports of the period.

Since its formation in 1948 British Baptists have taken their share in the various activities of the World Council of Churches. In preparation for the Faith and Order Conference held in Lund in 1952 the Baptist Union Council prepared a careful statement on "The Baptist Doctrine of the Church", re-emphasising many of the points made in the Baptist

^{*}The negative attitude of the Southern Baptist Convention was largely responsible. The Baptist groups represented were the Northern Baptist Convention, the Seventh Day Baptists of the U.S.A. and Holland, the Baptist Union of Ontario and Quebec, and the Baptist Churches of Germany.

^{*}To this were added two supplementary documents: *The Practice of Inter-Communion and 1662 and To-day*.

^{**}See *Report of the Baptist Union Council for 1938*. App. IV.

^{***}See E. A. Payne. *The Baptist Union: A Short History*. App. XI.

Reply to the Lambeth Appeal.* The following year the report of the Lund Conference was carefully studied and a statement was issued which contained a timely reminder of the great care needed in speaking of "the sin of division".** What Baptists understand by the historic continuity of the Church is defined as "the unfailing stream of divine life and love flowing in the fellowship of Christian men and women through the generations, in varied channels through which the Gospel is mediated"; it "does not depend on any one particular form of organisation".

British Baptists played a considerable part in the work of the International Missionary Council and its associated National Christian Councils, particularly those of India and China, as well as in the Conference of British Missionary Societies. The steps which led to the bringing together in 1961 of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches were carefully considered and were supported by representatives of both the Baptist Union and the Baptist Missionary Society.*** With the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in membership of the World Council of Churches are the American Baptist Convention, the Seventh Day Baptist Convention, the two Negro Baptist Conventions of the U.S.A., the Burmese Baptist Convention, the Baptist Unions of New Zealand, Denmark, Hungary and the Cameroons, the Samavesam of Telugu Baptist Churches, India, and the Union of the Evangelical Christian Baptists of the U.S.S.R. The Baptists of Holland joined the World Council of Churches in 1948, but withdrew in 1964. The Baptist Union of Scotland decided by a bare majority to join the World Council of Churches at the time of its formation. Later the relationship was called in question and, although a specially appointed sub-committee recommended confirmation of membership for a seven-year period, the Annual Assembly—influenced by the attitude of the largest Church in the Union—decided to withdraw for seven years. When the matter was again reviewed, it was clear that resumption of membership would not command general assent. In 1961 the Executive committee of the Baptist Union of Australia issued *Australian Baptists and the World Council of Churches*, a statement for and against affiliation for the guidance of State Unions in their reconsideration of the question. At its annual meeting in Quebec in 1966 the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, which has been represented at the World Conferences on Faith and Order, including Lausanne, 1927, resolved to request its Council "to take under advisement the feasibility and wisdom of this Convention becoming a member of the World Council of Churches."

*See E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union. A Short History*. App. X.

**See *Annual Report of the Baptist Union for 1953*. App. III.

***For the background, see E. A. Payne and D. G. Moses, *Why Integration?*, 1957.

The only denomination with whom during the period under review British Baptists have had exploratory talks with a view to union are the Churches of Christ (or Disciples). They practise believer's baptism, have a congregational polity and in their beginnings both in this country and the United States made converts from Baptist churches.* From 1941 to 1952 "unofficial" conversations took place with the knowledge of the Baptist Union Council. However, differing views of the relation of baptism to the work of the Holy Spirit and the saving work of Christ; of open membership; of the ministry; and of the amount of centralisation in denominational affairs showed themselves. During the last decade there has been little official contact. Recent informal soundings have resulted in the possibility of the resumption of talks, though the Churches of Christ have made clear that they would desire these to be within the framework of the Nottingham Resolutions. There are at present in this country 115 churches of this denomination with a total membership of some 6,500 persons. Both in the United States and Australia, where there are larger bodies of Disciples, they and the Baptists have from time to time made inconclusive approaches to one another. The Disciples are at present involved in negotiations for union with Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Methodists in New Zealand.** In the United States they are taking part as full members in the "Consultations on Church Union" (on what are sometimes called the Blake-Pike Proposals) with Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Evangelical United Brethren and the United Church of Christ (former Congregationalists and Church of the Brethren).***

*See E. Roberts-Thompson, *Baptists and Disciples of Christ*.

**See *The Joint Commission on Church Union: First Report of the Negotiating Churches*. Sept. 1965. The statement on Baptism, pp.12—15, is particularly worthy of study. See also the important issue of *Midstream*, Vol. V, No. 2 (Winter 1966): "Baptism and the Lord's Supper: materials for re-study", published by the Council on Christian Unity of the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ.

***See pp.8—9.

III

OLD AND NEW POINTS OF DIFFICULTY

Even a brief review of the discussions of the past half century makes clear the complexity of the issues involved. There have been tensions and differences of opinion within every Church which has shared in conversations or negotiations about the possibility of uniting with another Church. Neither in Britain nor elsewhere has any scheme been worked out which has universally commended itself. At the same time pressures of various kinds for new and closer relations between the Churches have increased. The linking of theological training with the Universities, respect for the same outstanding scholars, the use in many instances of the same textbooks, and—so far as the Free Churches are concerned—a number of co-operative and interdenominational training schemes, have all helped to break down the former barriers between different communions and to pose to all new questions about the will of God. One of the greatest difficulties arises from uncertainty and disagreement as to what are essential parts of the faith, and what may be optional forms of church order, and as to the basic relationship between Faith and Order.

In the discussions in Britain and overseas, and in those carried on under the aegis of the Faith and Order Department of the World Council of Churches, there have emerged again and again a number of issues which cause special uneasiness to many, probably most Baptists, though not to them alone. This uneasiness has been faithfully and repeatedly expressed by Baptist representatives in formal documents, in addresses and articles and in verbal discussion. The variety of doctrine and practice within the Baptist denomination has also been made clear.*

Among the points about which Baptists have naturally shown special concern are the following:—

- (1) Baptism
- (2) The authority or autonomy of the local company of believers
- (3) The Lord's Supper
- (4) The relationship of any form of episcopacy to the ministry as a whole

*See, e.g. the 1937 *Report on the question of Union between Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians*; the footnotes inserted by the Baptist representatives to the official report of the Edinburgh Faith and Order Conference; and the pamphlet "The Doctrine of Baptism" issued by the Baptist World Alliance in 1951.

- (5) The use of Creeds and Confessions, whether in worship or as tests for membership
- (6) The relationship of Church and State

On each of these matters something should here be said. It must also be noted that Baptists, in company with a number of others, have remained unconvinced that adequate attention has been given to the practical as well as theoretical problems of avoiding uniformity and rightly relating diversity to unity. Though they have often paid a heavy price for it, Baptists have cherished their spontaneity and individualism and have been fearful of quenching the Spirit. It must be admitted, however, that they have often had within their own ranks individuals and groups who have shown little tolerance of those who have not shared their particular doctrines and practices.

More recently there have emerged in certain Baptist circles questions about the authority given to Scripture. The suggestion has been made that church polity must strictly reproduce that of the New Testament and that this is still possible. Linked with this, on occasion, is an interpretation of 2 *Corinthians* vi. 14—vii.1 (Cf. *Revelation* xviii, 4.), which would require Christians to separate themselves rigidly from church fellowship with any with whom they are in theological disagreement. Baptists have always felt themselves ranged over against Roman Catholics and—until the developments of recent decades in Communist lands—over against the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Well into the present century they frequently found themselves sharply at issue with Lutherans in a number of lands. In certain quarters in Britain to-day there are Baptists who seem to wish to draw the boundaries of their church fellowship and even church relations in a much more rigid fashion than would exclude only Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans.

Most modern Biblical scholarship of whatever tradition would hold the view that the New Testament contains hints of more than one type of Church polity and that, even if the late B. H. Streeter over-simplified the situation by adapting the saying "All have won and all shall have prizes", there is no evidence of a uniform pattern or structure. While there are undoubtedly in the New Testament evidences of the existence of a church order that we now characterise by the name Independency, there are also indications that can lend support to some form of connexionalism or synodal organisation, and even to some form of episcopal order, understood in the broadest sense. That only one valid structure was intended by our Lord, laid down by Him for His church and for ever binding can be maintained only by a selective use of such references to church order as there are, by making unproveable assertions as to what may have been said in the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension, or by crediting the first Apostles with an authority in this matter which is nowhere clearly recorded. Any one of these three alternatives cuts

the ground from under any claim that the whole Bible (including all the books of the New Testament) provides a clear and uniform guide to church order. Certain of these matters will be considered afresh in chapter V.

Reference has already been made to the 2 *Corinthians* vi passage. It is clearly concerned with the relationships of Christians and pagans. All unsuitable ties with unbelievers, including those of marriage, must be avoided, says the Apostle. 1 *Corinthians* v. 9 f, suggests that there were some in Corinth who misunderstood teaching of this kind. Complete avoidance of unbelievers would involve that Christians "needs go out of the world", and would prevent their fulfilling their evangelistic responsibilities. They are, however, responsible for the behaviour and conduct of those within their local fellowships. But the Apostle's correspondence with the Christians of Corinth and the other centres of his missionary activity places repeated emphasis on the dangers of division into parties or sections on grounds of theological difference or personal attachment (see in particular 1 *Corinthians* i—iii). Moreover, it seems certain that "St. Paul never counsels any at Corinth to 'separate' himself from the body of his fellow Christians on account of their sinful lives To the Apostle separation from *heathendom* was imperative, but separation from the *Christian Church* was a schism and a sin".*

It is at this point that the problem of Church Relations becomes acute, and it is complicated by nearly two thousand years of history. "No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (1 *Corinthians* xii, 3. Cf. *Romans* x. 9). How can Christian communities and communions maintain the right visible fellowship with one another over against the world, whilst at the same time accepting differences of opinion, practice and church structure? Are there any matters which justify breaches in fellowship at the Lord's Table? If so, what are they? And since breaches have in fact occurred, of which some at least must be deplored, how can they most satisfactorily and speedily be repaired? It is in the light of these considerations that Baptists have to examine the questions about which they have felt and still feel concern. As they do so they should bear in mind that other Christian traditions and denominations are engaged in similar heart-searching on these and other issues.

(1) *Baptism.*

Their maintenance of baptism as a rite to be administered upon a personal profession of faith is generally regarded as the distinctive characteristic of Baptists. They base their practice on what appears to them to be the clear evidence of the New Testament. Their doctrine of the church, whether local or universal, as "a fellowship of believers" or a

"fellowship of committed disciples",* is linked with their understanding of the rite. The fact that Jesus was Himself baptized in the river Jordan, and that the Gospels ascribe to the Risen Lord an explicit command to baptize, has strengthened the conviction of Baptists that the rite is a divine ordinance, which should, whenever possible, be observed in the New Testament manner, that is, by immersion in water. Most Baptists would however agree, if pressed, that the subject of baptism is more important than the mode. Baptists have always felt and still feel under a strong obligation to maintain their witness to believer's baptism. The Constitution of the Baptist Union includes in its "Declaration of Principle" the statement:—

"That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day'."

Nevertheless, since the days of John Bunyan there have been not a few Baptists who have shared his view that "differences of judgment about water baptism" should be "no bar to communion", that is, to church fellowship. In the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries Baptist churches have been formed which have not insisted that all their members must have been baptized by immersion on profession of faith. Such churches have required of all members clear Christian commitment and behaviour but have stressed that everyone must be fully persuaded in his own mind regarding the rite. It has been recognised that Christendom as a whole has accepted and practised the baptism of infants, with varied doctrinal interpretations of the rite and differences of opinion as to whether direct Scriptural evidence for the practice can be found and as to whether this is in itself of decisive importance. Very rarely have any churches claiming the name Baptist been prepared to practise or sanction within their buildings the baptism of infants.** Baptists from the 17th century onward have resented and repudiated the name "Anabaptists" or "Re-baptizers". They have shared the general Christian conviction that the rite is by its very nature and character unrepeatable. They have, however, often accepted as candidates for believers' baptism those who have been baptized as infants by other Churches, justifying this to themselves and others by a refusal to admit that the baptism of infants is true Scriptural or Christian baptism.

The issue facing Baptists to-day is whether in the total context of Church Relations and needs in the 20th century they are justified in the rigid

*A phrase suggested by H. S. Bender, the Mennonite.

**Until recent decades it could be fairly confidently assumed that members of Baptist churches of the Bunyan or "open membership" tradition had been baptized as infants, if not as believers.

*J. H. Bernard, *Expositors Greek Testament*, III. p.80.

maintenance of believer's baptism as a ground of separation from other Christian traditions. In weighing this issue they have to bear in mind (i) the widespread desire in other traditions to overcome the difficulties to which indiscriminate infant baptism has led; (ii) the new theological and practical insights into the rite of Christian initiation offered by scholars of many different traditions and the very general acceptance of the validity of the basic Baptist claim; and (iii) the fact that most modern schemes of union whether for this country or for lands overseas, provide for the recognition of both believer's and infant (or sponsored) baptism, insisting that in the case of the latter full membership depends on a later personal profession of faith. It is clear that at the present time Baptists are not all of one mind as to how far for the sake of greater Christian unity it is or might be right to go in recognising infant baptism in this modified or supplemented form. Most Baptists feel an additional hesitation if it is insisted that the recognition of both current forms of baptism must exclude the baptism on profession of faith of anyone baptized as an infant. It is at least encouraging to observe the strenuous endeavours being made to make the theology and practice of Christian baptism conform to the ideal of a convinced and converted church membership. That more thought must be given by Baptists to the relationship of children to the believing community is increasingly recognised.* The considerable differences of opinion among Baptists on the question of baptism have to be recognised.** It remains to be seen whether any overwhelming consensus of opinion will emerge in the near future, and, if not, what the consequence may ultimately be for the denomination in its present form.

(2) *The authority or autonomy of the local company of believers.*

In Britain Baptist polity has been of the congregational type with an insistence that in the words of the Baptist Union Constitution—"Each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer the Laws of Christ." As originally asserted in the 17th century this meant that a company of believers covenanting together locally must determine their own doctrines and practices, in accordance with their understanding of the New Testament and after seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that they were free to choose their own church officers. It was always assumed, however, that a local company of believers charged with such serious responsibilities would, unless it

*See the report *The Child and the Church*, B.U., 1966. See also p.23, note 2.

**Recent books on baptism by Baptists which discuss many of the issues involved are:—*Christian Baptism* (edited by Alec Gilmore), 1959; N. Clark, *An Approach to the Sacraments*, 1956; R. E. O. White, *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation*, 1960; G. R. Beasley Murray, *Baptism Today and Tomorrow*, 1966, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 1962; Alec Gilmore, *Baptism and Christian Unity*, 1966; *The Doctrine of Baptism*, B.W.A. pamphlet, 1951.

proved quite impossible, consult sister congregations and seek regular fellowship with them, taking particular care to do this when a pastor was being chosen. Almost invariably the records of the 17th and 18th centuries indicate that no ordination to the pastorate was regarded as satisfactory unless already ordained pastors of other congregations were present and shared in the examination and setting apart of the candidate. The Baptist Churches of the 19th century formed themselves into Associations on a county or regional basis and these Associations have remained a basic element in denominational life in this country. The Baptist Union gives recognition in its Constitution both to the Associations and to local churches. In respect of the training, accrediting and support of ministers, the Baptist Union has had increasingly to undertake responsibilities which were formerly shared by the local church and the Association. There developed, however, in certain circles during the 19th century a greater emphasis on the independence or autonomy of the local church and in certain quarters this continues to be stoutly maintained. If carefully interpreted, it may be a valuable safeguard against too much centralised or bureaucratic control. If unduly pressed, it runs contrary to any sound and scriptural doctrine of the Church and weakens the effective witness and service both of the local church and the denomination. There are, however, genuine fears that some of the schemes of union proposed aim at an almost authoritarian and coercive structure which would deny its proper freedom to the local congregation.

Here again it has to be confessed that there are differences of opinion among Baptists and that insufficient thought has been given of recent years to an adequate doctrine of the Church and within it to a proper assessment of the necessary role of the Associations and the Union.* It should be remembered, as was noted in Chapter I, that while in Britain Baptist witness has expressed itself through a congregational or gathered church structure this has not been true universally overseas. Several of the Unions and Conventions in membership with the Baptist World Alliance exercise far more control over ministers and churches than does the Baptist Union. In a number of instances the church structures which have been created as a result of the activities of Baptist Missionary Societies are very different from the very mixed situation now prevailing in Britain. Baptists have to decide how far their present Church organisation is an essential expression of the Gospel, how far some of the things they claim are only custom and perhaps prejudice, how far certain traditional freedoms might well be sacrificed for the sake of a wider fellowship and a more united Christian witness.

*The diverse streams of thought among Baptists may be seen by comparing *The Pattern of the Church* (Ed. by A. Gilmore), 1963, and *Liberty in the Lord* (Baptist Revival Fellowship), 1964. See also the *Report of the Commission on the Associations*, B.U., 1964.

(3) *The Lord's Supper.*

As Baptism, so the Lord's Supper or Communion Service has raised problems for Baptists in their relation with other Churches. Frequency of observance is not regarded as of primary importance, although the tradition of some churches of holding the Communion Service weekly instead of monthly is looked on with favour by not a few Baptists. Baptists wish, however, to retain the freedom of the church to charge any of its officers or members to preside over the Supper, as over a baptism, though the officer will normally be the minister when he is present. Similarly the assistance of the deacons in the Supper, as confirming the nature of the service as a fellowship meal, is an insight of sufficient importance to be cherished.* Above all it is in the interpretation of the Supper that Baptists desire to preserve their present freedom: a view of the Supper as involving a transformation of the substances of bread and wine, or one which sees it as a fresh offering of the one sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood, is unacceptable to them. They claim the right to interpret the Supper as one of dramatic memorial and proclamation of Christ's redemptive death, of communion between the risen Lord and His people, of thankfulness and self-offering on their part, as in the case of Baptism, and of fellowship with both the Church militant and the Church triumphant.** Most Baptists would approve a statement regarding the Lord's Supper recently prepared by the Disciples of Christ of the U.S.A.: "Since it makes us one with Christ, its proper celebration requires understanding, reverence, penitence, and good order. Though properly administered by persons set apart by the church, it is not dependent upon a separate ministry who alone can give it validity or to whom its administration has been exclusively entrusted. It is the Lord's Supper and belongs to the whole Church. Finally, we hold that Christ is truly present in the Supper to those who by faith will receive Him."

During the 19th century when an "open" Table became general in Baptist churches, an invitation to participate was usually given "to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ" and this form of words is still frequently used. It was assumed that those responding would be in membership with a Christian church. Nowadays, the phrase "and are in membership (or fellowship) with a (or the) Christian Church" is frequently added, though some churches and ministers are ready to regard the Lord's Supper as "a converting agency", not to be confined to those already baptized

*See R. L. Child *The Lord's Supper*; N. Clark *An Approach to the Sacraments*; *Midstream* Vol. V, No. 2; Payne and Winward, *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship*.

**It is important to note what is and what is not said about the Lord's Supper in the Basis of Union and Book of Common Worship of the Church of South India (which unites former episcopal and non-episcopal churches). E.g. "The only indispensable conditions for the ministrations of the grace of God in the Church are the unchangeable promise of God Himself and the gathering together of God's elect people in the power of the Holy Ghost" (Basis 7th edition (revised) 1942. p.6).

believers. It would be generally agreed that it is not satisfactory for there to be participation by any who are not ready to make a Christian profession and publicly to assume the responsibilities of church membership.

(4) *The relationship of any form of Episcopacy to the Ministry as a whole.*

Since the Reformation the Churches of Western Christendom and those resulting from their missionary work overseas have been divisible into episcopal and non-episcopal Churches, that is, Churches with or without successions of bishops and a consequent hierarchy within the separated ministry. In the Church Unity conversations of recent decades—and particularly those between the Church of England and the Free Churches following the Lambeth Appeal of 1920—discussion turned on whether those holding to Episcopacy regarded it as of the *esse* of the Church or only of its *bene esse*, as an essential part of its divinely ordered structure and message or only as a well-proven and accepted method of exercising oversight and helping to preserve doctrinal and practical unity and continuity. The basic formularies of the Church of England do not impose any theory of Episcopacy. Within that Church there have been and are wide divergencies of view. But Episcopacy was one of the points mentioned in the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 and though this was modified in 1920 to "a ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body", it has always been assumed (and explicitly recognised by most Free Church representatives) that this involves some form of Episcopacy. Anglicans regard their episcopal succession as an important, indeed vital, link with those Lutheran Churches which have bishops and with the Orthodox and Roman Churches. This was accepted by the non-episcopal Churches which shared in the establishment of the present Church of South India. On the other hand, in Britain the English Nonconformists (and the Baptists perhaps most emphatically among them) and the Scottish Presbyterians regarded their struggles in the 17th century as a revolt against the authority of bishops. They were unable in the 18th and even the 19th centuries to see good reason to modify their generally critical attitude.

Of recent decades Baptists and Congregationalists in Britain have appointed General Superintendents and Moderators to assist with the oversight (*episcopate*) of the Churches and their ministers, which is clearly enjoined in the New Testament and of which experience has emphasised the need. More recently Methodists have appointed "Separated Chairmen" of districts with similar responsibilities. The scheme of union now under consideration by Methodists and Anglicans envisages a form of Episcopacy, which, whilst exercised in a constitutional manner, does involve

a formal link with the historic episcopal succession of the past. Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians have to face the question whether, in the interests of a wider unity, they would be right in accepting some similar form of episcopacy; whether the safeguards against its misuse are sufficient; whether it in fact offends against their basic understanding of the Gospel. Baptists have their own special hesitations at this point. They have never accorded to the separated ministry as revered a place in their church structure or their doctrine of the church as have the Presbyterians. The latter's insistence on "the parity of ministers" implies an authoritative position for ministers in the councils of the Church. Within Methodism "The Legal Hundred" and the Ministerial Session of Conference have a place which neither Baptists, or Congregationalists give to their ministers. Circumstances led both the last named bodies to accept the ministry of lay-men, "un-ordained" and often untrained, both for pastoral oversight and for the administration of the sacraments. They have accepted the ministry of women, though in a rather half-hearted and equivocal fashion. The fear of a priesthood separated from the corporate priesthood of all believers has been strong amongst Baptists and Congregationalists. At the same time in their selection and designation of ministers, lay-pastors and even of deacons modern Baptists have often become much more lax than their forebears, sometimes with unfortunate results.

The issue again becomes one of assessing whether the modifications and safeguards which episcopal churches are now prepared to accept go far enough to meet the hesitations which traditionally non-episcopal Churches naturally feel. Would a "constitutional Episcopacy" be dangerous?* Would it distort or obscure the Gospel? Would unfounded theories in regard to grace, past and present ministries, and the validity of the sacraments be thereby foisted on the uniting Churches? Would the freedom of the Spirit of which the New Testament speaks be quenched? In answering such questions Baptists must not forget that though they may see motes and even beams in the eyes of other Christians they cannot claim that their own vision or action has been so clear that it has avoided many scandalous situations.**

*As e.g. (1) the "Bishop in Presbytery" proposals put forward by representatives of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland in 1957, but in 1959 judged "un-acceptable in their present form" by the General Assembly; (2) the proposals for a personal episcopate set "within the corporate episcopate of the Church" put forward in 1963 in the discussions in Australia between Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians; and (3) the proposal for "the episcopate as one element in the life of the Church in which the councils of presbyters and the congregation of the faithful also have their appropriate places", as envisaged in the 1963 Report of the *Conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church*. See also the 1966 Anglican Report *Government by Synod*.

**For some of the questions raised by Free Churchmen in 1949 in discussions with the Anglicans in the Joint Conference on the Archbishop of Canterbury's Cambridge Sermon, see E. A. Payne, *Free Churchmen Unrepentant and Repentant*. Ch.4.

(5) *The use of Creeds and Confessions, whether in Worship or as tests of Membership.*

It is the conviction of all Christian people that in worship we come in the response of faith to the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ, and who continues to meet us in the Spirit as we gather in the name of Jesus. Any distinctively Baptist insights into the nature of worship are bound up with the Baptists' belief in the abiding supremacy of the authority of Scripture over tradition, their interpretation of the Gospel sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and their understanding of ministry as a function of the whole Body of Christ. Accordingly importance is attached to the sermon, which is included within the worship and not outside it, both in its prophetic aspect and as witness to the Good News for all men. The concept of a congregation responding to the grace of God in the praise of the hymns and in the praise and petition expressed in prayer is emphasised rather than the priestly function of the minister. The Baptist belief in the Spirit-gifted congregation, offering its worship and giving room for utterance of the Word by the members, as exemplified above all in the traditional concept of the Church meeting, has been greatly diminished through the years; it is desirable that it be recovered rather than lost as the Churches move into closer relations and share their resources in Christ.

There is no evidence that Baptists have ever used a creed or confession in worship, except on some rare and special occasion. In the 17th century, however, a number of important Confessions of Faith were drawn up by the representatives of groups of Baptist churches. The Confessions followed a pattern common to most of the Protestant Churches of the period, but in many instances assumed a large measure of agreement with traditional Christian doctrines and emphasised points of difference from other Christians. The so-called "Orthodox Creed" of the General Baptists, adopted in 1678, made as few departures as possible from the Westminster Confession and included an article stating that the Nicene, Athanasian and Apostles' Creeds "ought thoroughly to be received and believed". In the preface to this Confession it is said "We are sure that the denying of baptism is a less evil than to deny the Divinity or Humanity of Christ". The parallel Confession of the Particular Baptists, issued in 1677 followed the Westminster Confession even more closely, though it contains no explicit reference to the historic Creeds. Both Confessions contain articles on Liberty of Conscience. That of the Particular Baptists reads as follows:—

"God alone is Lord of the conscience and hath left it free from the Doctrines and Commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word, or not contained in it. So that to believe such

Doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit Faith, and absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy Liberty of Conscience, and Reason also”.

The 18th century saw a growing questioning of the adequacy of both the ancient Creeds and the Reformation Confessions, particularly if subscription to them was required as a test for entry to Oxford and Cambridge Universities or for public office. Though a number of local Baptist churches continued to set in their Minute Books Statements of Faith of some length (usually the work of the first pastor), most of the Associations of both the Particular Baptists and the New Connexion of General Baptists prepared brief summaries of beliefs. The declarations of some local churches from 1780 onwards were both broad in conception and brief in expression. As the 19th century advanced certain articles in even the brief summaries of doctrine came in question, as for example “the eternal punishment of the wicked”. When in 1888 the members of the Baptist Union Assembly sought to bring the Down Grade Controversy to an end, they expressly disavowed and disallowed any power to control belief or restrict inquiry, but at the same time asserted their “agreement with one another and with our fellow Christians on the great truths of the Gospel”. In 1905 the veteran Chairman of the first Baptist World Congress, Dr. Alexander McLaren, suggested that the first act of the Congress should be “the audible and unanimous acknowledgment of our Faith” and that for this purpose “not as a piece of coercion or discipline, but as a simple acknowledgment of where we stand and what we believe”, the Delegates stand and repeat with him the Apostles’ Creed. This was done.* In its reply to the Lambeth Appeal the Baptist Union stated:

“While we recognise the historic value of ancient Creeds, we cannot give them a place of authority comparable with that of the Scriptures”. More than twenty years later, in 1948, the Council of the Baptist Union stated that Baptists “claim as their heritage the great central stream of Christian doctrine and piety through the centuries”. Baptists have never used more than the simplest form of verbal confession in their baptismal services, though the candidate must make a personal response to the questions of the minister and the latter gives a further explanation of the rite, based usually on *Romans vi*. Baptists are now subject to two contrary influences so far as the main issue is concerned. On the one hand there are some among them who fear that references to the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds in a number of schemes of union, and in particular in public services inaugurating union, are dangerous. Even the ancient

*Report of the First Baptist World Congress, 1905. p.20.

Creeds are not in themselves fully adequate statements of the Christian faith, nor are they completely detachable from the circumstances and controversies which led to their formulation. It would be, in the view of many, an unfortunate and reactionary development were they again to become tests of orthodoxy.*

On the other hand there are those who feel that the retreat from creeds and confessions has gone too far. They would like the Baptist Union’s threefold Declaration of Principle elaborated and made into a more comprehensive doctrinal statement. Almost inevitably, however, what are then advanced as possible statements are “party” ones, representing a particular theological system, or the formulation of certain doctrines in avowedly controversial or partisan scenes. It would be very difficult at the present time for Baptists to make a united witness either in favour of the regular use of the ancient creeds or in favour of some already existing doctrinal statement, such as for instance that drawn up by the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 and still adhered to by many.** It would be even more difficult and divisive for Baptists to attempt at the present time, as have some Churches both in this country and America, an entirely new statement or summary of the Christian faith in modern categories and language.*** Probably the one matter on which all would say they are united is the danger of apparent agreement on statements which can be variously understood and interpreted. The danger of ambiguity and consequent

*Those who hold this view do not always appreciate, perhaps, the change of approach to the use of creeds, which has taken place since the beginning of the century in church union discussions. The Lambeth Quadrilateral in its original form included with the Holy Scriptures, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the Historic Episcopate, “the Apostles’ Creed as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith”. In the Lambeth Appeal of 1920 this was rephrased as follows: “The Creed commonly called Nicene, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith, and either it or the Apostles’ Creed as the Baptismal Confession of belief”. In a number of overseas schemes for united Churches the words now used are: “The Creeds commonly called the Apostles’ and Nicene as witnessing to and guarding that faith, which is continuously confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the experience of the Church of Christ” (See e.g. *Plans of Church Union in North India and Pakistan*, Fourth Revised Edition, 1965, p.4). The Churches engaged in negotiations in New Zealand (See p. 5) while describing themselves as “holding to the Apostolic Faith as expressed in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds”, propose to set forth the substance of their common faith in a newly prepared declaration consisting of nine articles. In *The Constitution of the Church of South India*, p.72, it is said: “The uniting churches accept the fundamental truths embodied in the Creeds named above (Nicene and Apostles’) as providing a sufficient basis of union; but do not intend thereby to demand the assent of individuals to every word and phrase in them, or to exclude reasonable liberty of interpretation, or to assert that those Creeds are a complete expression of the Christian faith”.

**It should be noted that, when adopted, it was “distinctly declared that this brief summary is not to be regarded, in any formal or ecclesiastical sense, as a creed or confession, nor the adoption of it as involving an assumption of the right authoritatively to define the limits of Christian brotherhood”.

***See for example the statement prepared by a committee of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and the new statement of faith of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.

misunderstanding both in statements of belief and schemes of union is obvious; but this emphasises the need of close and sincere discussion. Language, however—and not least theological and ecclesiastical language—though a necessary channel of expression and communication issuing in action, is a seriously limited one. Here, as in other areas of life, all too frequently “What is written kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 *Corinthians* iii. 6. Goodspeed’s translation).

(6) *The Relationship of Church and State.*

The first British Baptists rejected the completely negative attitude towards the magistracy and public office which characterised the Anabaptists and the early Mennonites. They followed them, however, in objection to any kind of coercion in religious matters and were pioneers in the struggle for freedom of worship. In the Commonwealth period only a few individual Baptists accepted parish livings at the hands of Cromwell’s Triers. From the time of the Restoration until the end of the 19th century Baptists were fighting with other nonconformists against the Established Church of England and the State authorities and demanded religious equality and full civil rights. These seemed to them to involve the disestablishment (and probably disendowment) of the Anglican Church. Baptists were therefore supporters of the disestablishment measures for Ireland and Wales and joined in agitation which they hoped would result in the Liberal Party moving against the Church in England. British Baptists—and even more emphatically the Baptists of the United States—have championed the separation of Church and State. Strong objection is felt to the appointment of bishops by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Crown, and to a number of other privileges, which inevitably attach to an established Church. It is certain that Baptists would find it impossible to “unite” with a Church or Churches which maintained the present relationship of the Church of England to the State. At the same time the 20th century has brought a number of significant changes, among which the following should be noted:—(1) personal and official relations between Anglicans and Free Churchmen have greatly improved; (2) Free Churchmen now suffer few disabilities except ones connected with social patterns and common to the sections of the community from within which come most of their members; (3) Anglicans have themselves become ill at ease with certain aspects of their present relationship with the State and not a few advocate changes which would give the Church much greater freedom; (4) the scheme of union under consideration by the Methodists and Anglicans specifically envisages changes before full union is achieved and Methodists have insisted that these would in their view be essential; (5) Free Churchmen have departed from the strict maintenance of the “voluntary system” favoured by their Victorian forebears and have shown themselves ready, in the changed conditions of modern life,

to accept financial aid from the Government to meet war damage, for youth work and for the training of ministerial candidates; (6) many Free Churchmen have come to believe there may be some advantages in some modified form of religious establishment in view of the growth of secularism, humanism and anti-Christian ways of life. The most recent formal statement on “Church and State” occurs at the end of the document “The Baptist Doctrine of the Church” issued by the Council of the Baptist Union in March, 1948.*

*See E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union. A Short History.* App. x. p.290 Cf. *The Free Churches and the State*, a report issued by the Free Church Federal Council in 1953.

IV

THE MODERN SCENE

The Resolutions of the Nottingham Faith and Order Conference require consideration in the light of the matters already discussed and also in the light of a number of recent developments, including the following:—

- (1) The negotiations which are proceeding between a number of British Churches with the object of some form of union.
- (2) The changing attitude on a number of matters within the Roman Church.
- (3) The increased self-consciousness across current denominational boundaries of those describing themselves as "conservative evangelicals".
- (4) The spread within a number of denominations of a "New Pentecostalism".
- (5) The increase in Britain, as elsewhere, of what may be described as "sectarian" Christianity, that of groups independent of the main Christian traditions and often "unorthodox" in some of their beliefs and practices.
- (6) Social changes accompanying or resulting from the Welfare State and the affluent society of modern times, the considerable movements of population since the war, and the greatly increased cost of sites and buildings.
- (7) New schemes and experiments resulting often from local initiative, the ecclesiastical embarrassment of which is only realised later.
- (8) The growing challenge of a secularism and humanism, which is often critical not only of the Churches and their form of worship, witness and service, but also of the religious education, Christian in intention, given in the nation's schools.

These developments have been concurrent and are not easily separable. They deserve brief comment.

(1) The Methodist Church and the Church of England have under consideration a scheme of union in two stages, the first involving intercommunion, the second full union. Operative decisions are expected in 1968. The Church of England and the Church of Scotland (with the Episcopal Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of England as consultant-observers) are engaged in renewed conversations aiming

at new relationships of mutual recognition. The Congregational Church of England and Wales (the result of a number of changes in the Congregational Union's structure) and the Presbyterian Church of England have been moving steadily into closer association at both local and national level and some form of organic union may be consummated by 1970 or shortly after.* Methodists, Independents, and Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Baptists began in 1961 to discuss the possibility of a "United Church of Wales". Official judgment on a draft plan has been asked for before the end of 1967. Whether or not any or all of these approaches of Churches to one another come to fruition, either in whole or in part, it is clear that within the next decade great changes in Church Relations in this country may be expected. They will inevitably influence relationships within the Free Church Federal Council and the British Council of Churches, and also local relationships. Those responsible for Baptist attitudes and policy are bound to weigh carefully the likely effect on Baptist churches and the Baptist denomination as a whole of the changes that may come.

(2) It is too early to assess the long-term significance and results of the Vatican Council summoned by Pope John XXIII and presided over at its conclusion by his successor, Pope Paul VI. The Decrees on Revelation, on the Church, on the Liturgy and on Ecumenism, together with the Declaration on Religious Liberty, were all highly important documents registering new attitudes within the Roman Church. Here in Britain, as well as in other lands, the Roman Hierarchy and many of the priests and laity are showing an eagerness for discussion, fellowship and even joint worship and activity in a manner previously unknown. Baptists as a whole respond more cautiously to these things than some other Churches. This is not unnatural in view of what Baptists suffered in the past, what Baptists in Spain and Colombia have suffered of recent days, and what still divides Baptists and Roman Catholics in their interpretation and expression of the Gospel. Some Baptists have vigorously and publicly expressed alarm at any fraternisation with Roman Catholics and a deep suspicion of recent developments within the Roman Church. It is clear, however, that there will be in the next few years quite inevitably increasing contacts at the local and national level. The presence of Roman Catholics in many ministers' fraternals, at services, as observers in local Councils of Churches and the British Council of Churches, is not something that can or should be prevented. It will be an increasing challenge to a convinced and charitable presentation of what Baptists

*The International Congregational Council voted in July 1966 to join the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The Executive Committee of the World Alliance has approved the submission of union proposals to members of both bodies. It is stated that 75% of Congregationalists and more than half of all Presbyterians are now involved in church unions or negotiations towards such.

and other Christians have learned of the grace of God and His ways.*

(3) Those who feel themselves to be conservative in theology and in church practice have of recent years drawn together within and across denominational boundaries. They have felt themselves out of sympathy with, if not actively hostile to, ecumenical trends and developments. But the labels "Evangelical" and "Conservative Evangelical" have become ambiguous. On the Continent of Europe and in the title of a number of Churches in America and elsewhere, the word "Evangelical" has been synonymous with "Protestant". To say, as does the recently formed Evangelical Movement of Wales, that the word "simply designates those who resolutely endeavour to be faithful to the Gospel"*** is offensive and wholly out of relationship with the realities of ecumenical discussions, conducted as they are with an earnest desire to help the churches more adequately to express the truth of the Gospel. The adjective "Conservative" is sometimes used to dissociate those who favour it from "Fundamentalism"***. But the Conservative Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. is markedly "fundamentalist" and remains aloof from all other Baptist bodies. It is probably true to say that most of those who are attached to the label "Conservative Evangelical" find themselves also still in sympathy with the doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Alliance; they remain dissatisfied with even the expanded basis of the World Council of Churches; they are critical of the orthodoxy of certain individuals who have been associated with that Council; they are disturbed that the Orthodox Churches are in membership and that the Roman Church now sends observers to certain meetings; they are not ready to accept emphatic and repeated assurances in official documents that the World Council

*It should be noted that, in addition to the Working Group of eight representatives of the W.C.C. and six representatives of the Roman Church established in 1965 to consider principles and methods of discussion and collaboration in accordance with the decision of the Central Committee of the W.C.C. at its Enugu meeting (see app. III to B.U. Report for 1965), the C of E, the L.W.F., and the World Methodist Conference have set up their own liaison groups. The B.C.C. is in process of appointing a representative group for similar liaison purposes, and Cardinal Heenan has stated publicly that he would welcome direct contacts with each of the Free Churches as well as the Anglican Church. The American Baptist Convention has under consideration a proposal to establish a joint Baptist—Roman Catholic group at the invitation of Msg. William Baum. Even more significant is the fact that Professor J. W. McClendon of the Southern Baptist Convention's Golden Gate Seminary, nr San Francisco, has accepted appointment as Visiting Professor of Religion at the Jesuit University of San Francisco.

***The Christian Church: A Biblical Study*, 1966, p.21.

***In 1895 a Bible Conference at Niagara Falls drew up a list of five "fundamental truths" which it declared ought to be literally accepted: (1) absolute belief in the Virgin Birth, (2) literal payment for man's sins by Christ substituting in death on the cross, (3) the physical resurrection, (4) the visible, bodily return of Jesus to the earth, (5) the absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures. The big campaign in support of these five points was launched from California in 1909, but it was in the 1920s that tension and division over them caused splits among the Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Disciples in America.

will not, indeed cannot, from its very nature and constitution become a "super-church" or enforce any kind of ecclesiastical uniformity.* These dissatisfactions and suspicions are found in a number of quarters. They received public expression at a National Assembly of Evangelicals, held under the auspices of the Evangelical Alliance in September, 1965. Nevertheless, the Assembly set up a body to investigate the possibility of a United Church of Evangelicals in Britain, a Church which would need to find its own way of overcoming the differences between episcopal and non-episcopal structures, and between varied forms of worship. The decision of this National Assembly was itself a recognition of the importance of the issues which lie behind the resolutions of the Nottingham Conference. In October, 1966, a second National Assembly of Evangelicals, in spite of a plea by Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones that "conservative evangelicals" leave their present denominations, approved by a large majority the statement that there is at present no widespread demand for the completely new alignment of the kind suggested, though the closer collaboration of those of like mind should be fostered.** The unity of Christians "such as Christ wills and by the means He wills" was the aim of Abbé Couturier, the Roman Catholic ecumenist. That the implications of this be fully and frankly faced by those of every ecclesiastical and theological standpoint, is clearly necessary and to be welcomed.

(4) A new wave of "Pentecostalism" has spread of recent years in a number of denominations, including both the Anglican and the Baptist. It is free from many of the crudities of earlier outbreaks, but is accompanied by the "gift of tongues". It combines charismatic elements with the Puritan piety, biblical and theological conservatism and a strong evangelistic and missionary outlook. Since it numbers among its adherents men with theological training, it could, if excesses are avoided, result in a further strengthening of movements which sit lightly to the denominational loyalties of the past but yet seek a focus of unity. It is significant that a number of Anglicans, who have been led to accept believers' baptism and have recently left the Established Church, have not become Baptists. Whether or not they enter one or other of the older Pentecostal Churches, they appear to be Pentecostalist in outlook. It should also be noted

*See, in particular "The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches", a statement transmitted to the member Churches by the Central Committee after its meeting in Toronto in 1950, and the Report on the section on Unity of the Third Assembly of the W.C.C. *The New Delhi Report*, 1962, pp.116—134.

**See *The Report of a Commission on Church Unity to the National Assembly of Evangelicals*, 1966. A booklet issued by a group of Irish Baptists, *Ecumenism Examined*, 1966, presents criticisms of the Ecumenical Movement current in certain "conservative evangelical" circles and argues for "closer discussions with evangelicals who share their outlook and desire closer relationships with them".

however that two Pentecostalist churches have joined the World Council of Churches.*

(5) Both in Britain and in a number of other lands there has been a growth of "sectarian" Christianity, that is, of groups independent of the main ecclesiastical and theological traditions and with an often tenuous link with the main stream of Christian teaching. They include Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc. Their number in Britain has been increased of recent years by the wave of immigration from the West Indies and West Africa, where there are many so-called "Independent Churches" of doubtful "orthodoxy".

(6) The social changes of recent years present many new challenges to the accepted patterns of all denominations. The redistribution of wealth and of population, cheap and rapid means of travel, mass media of communication, new knowledge and new scientific and technological achievements all combine to undermine alike the parish system and the gathered congregation. The main Christian traditions in Britain—Anglican, Free and Roman—have found themselves compelled in the face of the plans of local authorities and their own financial limitations to accept a considerable measure of "direction" regarding new sites and have agreed that there must be in new towns and on new housing estates as little obvious overlapping and competition as possible. But it becomes increasingly problematic what buildings can or should be erected, where the thrust of modern evangelism should be, and what "plant" effective evangelism and Christian nurture require. There is increasing pressure in many places—and sometimes in old as well as new areas—for united witness, if possible from one centre, even if within one set of buildings various forms of worship take place.** In certain places, particularly in the south-east of England and in the great conurbations of the midlands and the north, shortage and dearness of land is likely in the future to make the traditional one storey type of church development difficult, if not impossible. The many new social pressures have a clear bearing on the question of Christian unity. They combine with theological questionings regarding the future patterns of mission and ministry.

(7) It should be noted that in a number of places local initiative has already outrun denominational decision, even if it has at the same time caused unfavourable reactions in certain local groups. Neighbouring congregations of different traditions are joining for united services, Bible study and evangelistic effort. In some instances congregations have set

*On the general question of the growth of Pentecostalism see an important article by Walter J. Hollenweger, Executive Secretary in the Department of Studies in Evangelism of the W.C.C., *Ecumenical Review*, July, 1966.

**See *Sharing of Churches*, Report of a Commission appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and York, 1966, and *Putting Together*, Prism Pamphlet, No. 33.

themselves to become "united churches"—these moves sometimes being along lines different from those to which the denominations are officially committed. There are also the industrial and university situations to which the answer seems to be some kind of "chaplaincy", which whether based on an existing local church or requiring the provision of a special building, cannot be a purely denominational one.

(8) These developments cannot be separated from the general intellectual and spiritual climate of the times and the challenges to Christian belief and practice from secularism, humanism and bleak indifference. The position and character of religious education in schools, as agreed by the representatives of the Churches and accepted in 1944 by Parliament, begins to be called in question. This further emphasises the need for the Churches to reconsider their relations with one another.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The New Testament does not provide any formal systematic discussion on the unity of the Church, any more than it does on other aspects of the Church and its mission. The writers of the New Testament, however, could not but be aware of the deep divisions of the society in which they lived, and they were equally conscious of the impact made by the fellowship of the Spirit on those divisions. The reconciliation effected by God in Christ transformed the relations not only between God and man but between man and man. One could hardly contemplate the Church, therefore, without being reminded of the healing of enmities in the new order created by Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The Church was called into being by the redemptive activity of God in Christ. It is a mistake to select a single point of time at which the Church came into being, prior to which it did not exist. Pentecost, for example, was not so much the birth of the Church as its rebirth by the Spirit (it was to the Church that He was sent!). The total redemptive ministry of the Lord was concerned with the people of God. Characteristically, the ministry of Jesus began with His baptism; it took place among penitent Jews who had welcomed the message of John the Baptist and by their baptism signified their desire to be numbered among the people approved by the Messiah. It was the task of Jesus to refashion that Remnant in accordance with the word and work committed to Him. In the phrase of a scholar of former days, His Church was to be "Israel made new in the Remnant". From among them He called His twelve disciples, in accordance with the number of the tribes of Israel. These Apostles He sent to Israel with the word of the Kingdom—to extend the believing Remnant. From the Twelve He elicited the confession of Himself as Messiah—the Head of the messianic people. With them as its representatives He made the New Covenant in bread and wine at the Last Supper. For them and all men He died and rose from death and sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The entire process of this once-for-all redemption of the Saviour was directed to the creation of the people of the Kingdom. To introduce into this set of concepts the thought of a multiplicity of divided Churches is as out of place as the idea of a plurality of kingdoms of God, or a profusion of Saviours, or a number

of different Gospels. The one Church corresponds to the one Saviour and one salvation. "I am the good Shepherd, I know my own sheep and my sheep know me—as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. But there are other sheep of mine, not belonging to this fold, whom I must bring in: And they too will listen to my voice. *There will then be one flock, one shepherd.*" (John 10. 14ff).

This consciousness of the unity of the Church in the one Lord was embedded in the life of the Church from the beginning, and it constantly rises to the surface in the New Testament Epistles. In a variety of ways the unity of the Church was characterised by its relation to the incarnate Christ, to the presence of the Spirit, and to the saving purpose of God the Father. Such figures of the Church as the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Temple of God by the Spirit, the chosen Race, royal Priesthood, holy Nation, people of God's love, all conjoin with the Church the idea of unity, and in such fashion as to make the concept of alienated Churches inconceivable. "As the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ". (1 Cor. 12. 12). It is as simple and axiomatic as that: one Christ, one Body. Interestingly, it would appear that a local church can be viewed in this light as well as the whole Church, but this is so because a single congregation is a microcosm of the whole—the Church in heaven as well as that on earth. Paul therefore can describe a local church as Christ's body (1 Cor. 12. 14-27) a pure virgin espoused to Christ, (2 Cor. 11. 2) a holy temple of the Lord (1 Cor. 3. 16 and 2 Cor. 6. 16), just as the whole Church is the Body of Christ, His Bride, and a temple of the Lord by the Spirit. But all this presumes the unity of the Church of Christ: it is the one Church of God that is expressed in each locality where men and women meet in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Nowhere is this oneness of the Church more forcibly expressed than in *Eph. 4: 4-6*, where the writer employs traditional confessional language to set forth the unities of the Christian faith.

"There is one body and one Spirit,
Just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call,
One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
One God and Father of all,
Who is over all and through all and in all".*

Here the unity of the Church and its faith and hope are rooted in the unity of God the Father, Son and Spirit in the work of redemption. Unity is therefore no more accidental to the Church than it is to the

* Compare *Ephesians 1*.

Godhead. Or, more positively, unity is as integral to the Church so surely as God is one and not three gods, so surely as there has been (and can only be) one incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, one redemption wrought by Him and one Holy Spirit of Pentecost uniting us to the Son. Under different categories this same fundamental presupposition is reflected in the prayer of consecration in *John 17*:

“May they all be one:
As thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, so also they be in us . . .
The glory which thou gavest me I have given to them, that they may be one as we are one”. (vv. 21f).

The prayer has in view the result of Christ’s redeeming action, whereby reconciliation is wrought and God’s new order brought into being. In that new order all enmities are abolished. Factions between the children of God are as incongruous as hostilities between the Father and the Son or between the Redeemer and the Redeemed. Accordingly the unity of God should be reflected in the unity of the Church. Any departure from this principle is alien to the new creation of which the Church is part.

It is surely significant that the worship of the Church, while affording scope to the wide variety of gifts in the members of the Body, has as its focal points means for the fostering of the Church’s unity and expression of the same. The mode of entry into the Church, administered in the context of worship, is baptism, viewed in the apostolic writings as a joyous entry into the community wherein the divisions of this world have no place. “Through faith you are all sons of God in union with Christ Jesus. Baptized into union with him, you have all put on Christ. There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female, for you are all one (Body) in Christ Jesus” (*Gal. 3. 26ff*). Or, as Paul writes elsewhere, “We were all brought into one body by baptism, in the one Spirit, whether we are Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free men” (*1 Cor. 12. 13*). When men and women turn to Christ and are baptized in faith in Him they enter a new world in which the enmities and class divisions of society have no meaning, and in Christ they become one. This is part of the triumph of redemption. When the sin that erects barriers between man and God is overcome, the walls of division between man and man go down too. There is no more room for the perpetuation of social barriers among the redeemed any more than there is room for them in heaven, for the kingdom into which we have been delivered (*Col. 1. 13*) embraces earth and heaven.

What is true of the sacrament of initiation into Christ holds good of the sacrament of continuance in Christ. The Lord’s Supper is a means of remembering the Lord in His redeeming acts and of fostering the unity created by redemption.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body: for it is one loaf of which we all partake” (*1 Cor. 10. 16f*).

The abandonment of one loaf in a communion service has resulted in the danger of an important feature of this service being neglected. Just as the sharing in a common cup is a means of fellowship for all who drink it—and therefore in this case participation in the redemption that the Christ, who gives the cup, has accomplished for men—so to eat of the one loaf is to have partnership with the Lord in the surrender of His body for us. But more: those who in faith eat of the one loaf bear witness to the fact that they are one Body, for that loaf represents Christ in His self-giving on the Cross and Christ as His Body, the Church. “Because there is one loaf we are one Body”. To participate in the loaf is to experience fellowship with the Redeemer and fellowship with the Body, to know in depth both aspects of fellowship, and therefore to grow ever deeper into their reality. The Supper is a sacrament* of *koinonia*—a means of rooting Christ’s people in Him and in the Body.

That which is common to baptism and to the Lord’s Supper is the Word that gives meaning to both. There is but one Gospel, and through witness to it the Church is ever anew called into being—one people, created by response to the good news of Christ. The Church of the Lord Jesus is constantly reminded of its unity, as its members make common confession of their faith. For this reason some sort of credal affirmation seems inevitable, even though the creeds be viewed as confessions of the one faith, and not tests for exclusion or shackles on interpretation. But yet more important than confessing the faith is *witnessing* to the faith in the world. If unity is experienced in the former, it is certainly known in engaging on the latter. The first preaching of the Christian Gospel in its fulness took place on the Day of Pentecost, after the accomplishment of Christ’s redemption and the sending of the Spirit. It is significant that this first proclamation of the Gospel by an Apostle took place in the setting of a whole congregation declaring “the great things God has done” (*Acts 2. 11*), and it was directed to a multi-lingual group drawn from all over the known world. It is significant because the Church is rooted in a redemption that is for the whole world, and it has been constituted by the Holy Spirit who is essentially the Spirit of prophecy. The Church has been fashioned in order to be the means of perpetuating God’s mission to mankind in Christ. As the Father

* The word sacrament is here understood as a symbol through which the grace of God becomes operative where faith is present. “Koinonia” is a Greek word translated in the RSV as “a means of sharing”.

sent the Son, the Son has sent His Church (*John* 20. 21). To be baptized into the Son is to be baptized into the mission of Christ. To engage in that mission is to know unity with Christ and fellowship with His people in their travail for the souls and bodies of men. From the Biblical point of view, for the Church to engage in mission disunitedly, and even sometimes in mutual opposition, is to split the mission of God and to weaken the power of the Gospel.

In the light of these considerations it is not surprising that the Apostle should write, "Spare no effort to make fast . . . the unity which the Spirit gives" (*Eph.* 4. 3). The fellowship among men created by the Holy Spirit on the basis of the redeeming work of Christ is so precious and so costly, the Church should make every effort to preserve it; presumably the Apostle would have urged, had he known our conditions, that we make a like effort to recover it where it has been lost. The thrust of the exhortation should not be turned by asserting that the unity of the Church is "spiritual". We must avoid the peril of making "spiritual" mean "ineffectual". The operation of the Spirit is unseen, but its effects are intended to be evident. The love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness that the Spirit inspires are either seen in action or they are absent; i.e. if these things are not apparent, it is to be presumed that the Spirit is not effectively at work in the life of the believer both individually and collectively. In the Bible the Holy Spirit appears as the One through whom God's Power goes into *action* in this world, alike in creation and in redemption. So surely as the activity of the Spirit among God's people should inspire holy actions in the world, so the unity He creates should be expressed in a fellowship that is visible to all.

This is apparent when we consider a local church, for it is in a local community of Christ's people that the Body of Christ finds its most obvious expression. A local church where members are divided against one another and will have nothing to do with each other is a denial of the fellowship of the Spirit and of the Church as the Body of Christ. Does not the same principle apply to the wider associations of churches we call denominations, both within themselves and in their relations to one another? Admittedly, denominations do not appear in the Bible, but in New Testament times there were groupings of churches in scattered provinces of the Roman empire, and more significantly, there was a Jewish-Christian church, closely related to the synagogues of Palestine and the Temple of Jerusalem, still maintaining the full observance of the Mosaic Law, and Gentile churches whose mode of life and religious outlook must have differed widely from those of the Jewish Christians. Yet it was in that context of churches separated by distance and experiencing tensions through differing national outlooks and religious traditions that the doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ was enunciated.

To the earliest Christians the unity of the Church was a reality that had to be guarded, and they were ready to give obedience to the apostolic call to preserve it. It is in this spirit that we should view our task to-day.

It is a far cry now from Ephesus but the Biblical basis of unity is surely undeniable and still valid. As members of the Church we should still have a deep concern to guard and recover the unity of the Spirit in the Body of Christ. Baptists, in particular, need to examine their attitude towards such a recovery and to ensure that they are prompted by Biblical exegesis and Biblical theology. There is probably no other major denomination in which there is such widespread doubt concerning the present desire and movement to recover the unity of the Church. It would be impossible in so brief a compass to attempt to characterize the various attitudes amongst Baptists towards Church unity without either over-simplifying or caricaturing points of view—or both. We will therefore limit ourselves to suggesting certain points for consideration which arise from the foregoing Biblical exegesis.

(a) We should distinguish between the concepts of the unity of the Church and the union or re-union of the churches. Unity is a gift of God to His people. "Through faith you are all sons of God in union with Christ Jesus. Baptized into union with Him, you have all put on Christ as a garment. There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freemen, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus" (*Gal.* 3. 26). We discover unity as, through faith, we are baptized into Christ. The outcome of such a response to the grace of God in Christ can be stated uncompromisingly: we are all one person in Christ. This is the unity that God gives us, but it is not to be fully understood or manifested until "We all attain . . ." (*Eph.* 4. 12).

Union and Reunion are the work of man led by the Holy Spirit. The result is the organisational union of church structures. This is not to say that this is always right for all denominations nor indeed that in the end the outcome of reunion will be one world-church organisation. There are many who will feel that it is both possible and desirable to have in view a goal in which unity shows itself in unified ministries and intercommunion, without necessarily joining denominational structures.

The New Delhi statement on "the unity which is both God's will and His gift" explicitly states that "unity does not imply simple uniformity of organisation, rite or expression", and makes clear an important emphasis, namely that unity must constantly be made visible in the working and growing together of local congregations. Nottingham echoed this thought in its title of "One Church renewed for Mission". Baptists have always been concerned for mission and would press that unity and mission belong inseparably together. The Lund dictum that

the denominations should "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately", if translated into action in the local church situation, would not only help the Church's mission, but also would shed the new light of the experience of unity in action, on reunion schemes.

This is particularly important in view of the emphasis which Baptists themselves lay upon the responsibility of individual church members to share in the Church's mission. As such sharing develops—say in industry or in teaching—the church member tends to find that Christian unity is vital, union and reunion appear of less importance. It is likely that many of the doubts of Baptists concerning the ecumenical movement will diminish if the present speeding up of local activity together in the mission of the Church continues, showing that talk by theologians on union schemes is being matched by action to make unity visible.

(b) Baptists must take more seriously the fact that Paul sets baptism in the context, not only of the response of faith, but also of Unity. *Galatians* 3. 26 makes this clear. In view of this—and in order to clarify for themselves and others their thinking—Baptists need to face the question of what is meant by 'through faith you are all sons of God in Union with Christ Jesus'. What is the content of the phrase 'through faith'? Faith is commitment, trust. But it is trust in One who has revealed Himself in redeeming acts, and faith confesses their saving significance. Faith accordingly has an objective content that can be described.

Within the New Testament there is evidence of simple baptismal confessions, e.g. 'Jesus Christ is Lord' (*Phil.* 2. 11). Later on, as the catechumenate developed, a longer baptismal confession of faith was offered, from which have developed the traditional creeds of the Church. These confessions of faith were made, however, as positive affirmations of faith and contained statements of the great doctrines of the Gospel rather than detailed explanations and interpretations of them. They were developed and revised by representatives of the whole Church. Such credal statements can be viewed in two ways. First as triumphal confessions of faith in which Christians can join to confess their unity in Christ and His Gospel, and secondly as tests for exclusion. The baptismal creeds in their origin belong to the former interpretation. Those who say: "Either you accept this statement of faith which we have drawn up or else we will not agree that you are in Christ and we will have no fellowship with you", reflect a spirit foreign to the origins of baptismal confession, though not, of course, to certain occasions in Church History. These things have to be frankly stated and frankly faced by Baptists, lest any come *unawares* into the position of denying that another—even a fellow Baptist—is a child of God in Christ.

Beyond the faith confessed in baptism lie the fellowship of the Church and the mission of the Church. The fellowship of the Church is reflected in the recognition of unity in Christ through baptism. All church groups are thinking and pronouncing much on this point at this time. Speaking of the status of separated Christians, the decree of the Vatican Council 'De Ecclesia' states "For there are many who honour Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a pattern of life, and who show a true apostolic zeal. They lovingly believe in God, the Father Almighty, and in Christ, the Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by baptism in which they are united with Christ". This statement constitutes a challenge to us to examine our understanding of the New Testament and Unity, and what we ourselves mean by the oneness of those baptized into Christ.

Baptism is a sacrament of mission, for being united to Christ involves witnessing to the faith in the world. As we have suggested already, in such a witness our unity is discovered. The unity of the Spirit is known in mission activity, and the wholeness of the baptismal understanding of unity requires the continued participation in mission.

(c) It is in the local church that Baptists find their Christian life centred. Within it they are nurtured and come to a confession of faith in baptism. Within it they find themselves as members of a fellowship of believers. Within it and through it they share in the responsibility of Christians in mission to the world. All too often, however, Baptists, whilst being deeply concerned for particular mission work on the traditional mission fields abroad, have insufficient concern for the sense of wholeness of the Christian Church either in extent or in unity.

Whilst there is no doubt that it is in the local church that church membership becomes meaningful, and that the local church is a company obviously engaged in mission, to have insufficient regard for the wider fellowship is to be deficient in churchmanship, according both to the New Testament and also to the stated Baptist understanding of the Church. We would call attention to two statements, both taken from the declaration issued in 1948:

"Although Baptists have for so long held a position separate from that of other communions, they have always claimed to be part of the one, holy, catholic Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. They believe in the catholic Church as the holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, which He founded, of which He is the only Head, and in which He dwells by His Spirit, so that though manifested in many communions, organised in various modes and scattered throughout the world, it is yet one in Him".

"It is in membership of a local church in one place that the fellowship of the one, holy, catholic Church becomes significant. Indeed, such gathered companies of believers are the local manifestation of the one Church of God on earth and in heaven. Thus the church at Ephesus is described, in words which strictly belong to the whole catholic Church, as 'the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood'. (Acts. 20: 28). The vital relationship to Christ which is implied in full communicant membership in a local church carries with it membership in the Church which is both in time and in eternity, both militant and triumphant. To worship and serve in such a local Christian community is, for Baptists, of the essence of churchmanship".

If Baptists really believe these statements there is clearly contained within them a challenge to face up to the events of to-day. For the visible unity of Christ's Church is a concept rooted in the New Testament and we cannot, as true followers of Christ, ignore what the Spirit is doing in the churches to-day. Do any of us really believe that it is not the Spirit of Christ who is drawing churches out of isolation into discussion and activity together? The realities of the Church's unity that have engaged our attention surely demand that some effort be made to embody them in the empirical life of the Church; is it really God's will to cease such efforts and leave the appalling *status quo* till the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgement? And what will the Judge say to us if we do? If the unity of the Church is of moment to Him, ought it not to be of concern to us? It is clear that opinions differ as to how the Church's unity is to be known and expressed; such difference calls for participation in the discussions that are proceeding among the churches, that we may together learn the mind of the Spirit for the Church to-day.

VI

CONCLUSION

From what has been said, it seems clear:

1. That Christian unity is of great importance, urgency and complexity; whilst there is an undeniable spiritual unity binding together all believers to our Lord Jesus Christ and to one another, this needs to be given visible expression in a clearer and more unmistakable manner than at present.
2. That British Baptists need to give much closer thought to the issues involved; to discuss among themselves, and particularly with those whose initial standpoint is different, the issues involved; to prepare materials for the education of church members; and to examine carefully and make more effective the present relations not only between the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, the sister Unions in Wales and Scotland, and the Baptist Missionary Society, with all of whom it already has close links, but with the various Strict Baptist Associations and the Baptist Union of Ireland.
3. That the Ecumenical Movement in general, and the Faith and Order discussions in particular, have helped towards a great improvement in Church Relations, a growth in mutual understanding and charity, and a clearer recognition of the matters at issue between and within the different denominations.
4. That for Baptists to weaken their links with either the British Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches would be a serious loss to themselves and would make it more difficult for Baptists to present their distinctive witness and heritage to others; to receive in return from them other insights and corrective truths till "all come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God . . . unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (*Eph.* 4. 13); and would restrict Baptist participation in the evangelistic strategy and mission which are needed.
5. That so far no plan of church union or scheme for basically altered Church Relations has been put forward in Britain to which Baptists could unitedly or near unitedly give assent, but that their close study of current discussions and negotiations, whether as official "observers" or not, is of great importance.
6. That, whilst, as was realised at the Nottingham Conference, it is important on both theological and practical grounds, to set a clear goal

before the Churches, it would be a mistake for the Baptist Union (and perhaps for some others) to press the idea of organic union by 1980, lest it endanger denominational unity, and thereby seriously weaken the witness Baptists have to make.

7. That though the Baptist Union is not able at present to enter into a covenant to work and pray for the inauguration of union by 1980 or any other particular date, Baptists are right in sharing in the exploration of what covenanting together might mean and the conditions on which it might become possible for Baptists. Patient exploration and discussion of the issues set out in the preceding pages both within the denomination and with those of other denominations is likely to be more possible and profitable for Baptists than any immediate attempt to state the conditions under which it might be possible for the Baptist Union to enter into a covenant to work and pray for the inauguration of union with other Churches by a particular date.

8. That, in regard to other particular resolutions passed by the Nottingham Conference, the attitude of the Council should be:

(1) To urge steady and continued efforts to secure that local congregations of different denominations get to know one another better and consider together a more unified plan of Christian witness; to foster similar contacts at the national level; and to urge the British Council of Churches to aid such efforts.

(2) To share, wherever possible, in co-operation with local Baptists, in the designation of "areas of ecumenical experiment".

(3) To encourage co-operative liturgical study, with special reference to the difficulties in the way of inter-communion or open communion; and to indicate that the Baptist Union has no objection to the British Council of Churches sponsoring such study and discussion, provided it is recognised that any proposals require the independent consideration and authorisation of the member Churches.

(4) To indicate to the British Council of Churches a willingness to share in a special British consultation on Christian initiation, but to express doubt as to whether the time is ripe for the undertaking by the British Council of Churches of work among children up to the age of 15, assuring the British Council of Churches, however, that any plans to this end favoured by a majority of the Churches in membership with the B.C.C. would be carefully considered.

(5) To express acceptance and approval of the need for more "ecumenical education for ministry", but to indicate doubt whether it would be right or possible in the immediate future to set up an "ecumenical college" for this purpose.

9. That the possibility of renewed conversations with the Churches of Christ is warmly to be welcomed and should not preclude the consideration of approaches from or to other bodies willing to discuss matters in the general context of this report.

At its meeting on March 7, 1967, the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland agreed that:

1. This report be received and adopted.
2. This report to be sent to the churches and associations in membership with the Baptist Union for their careful study, and that the Associations be urged to appoint a member of the Association Committee to give special attention to matters connected with Church Relations.
3. This report be sent to the British Council of Churches and the Churches in membership therewith and to the Baptist World Alliance and to Baptist Unions and Conventions overseas, and be made available to the press.
4. The Advisory Committee on Church Relations be instructed to review the situation in twelve months' time in the light of expressions of opinion within the denomination and the progress of discussions by the member churches of the British Council of Churches, and to report again to the Baptist Union Council not later than November 1968.

Appendix I

BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

FIRST BRITISH FAITH AND ORDER CONFERENCE

September 12th—19th, 1964

A. TEXTS OF RESOLUTIONS FROM THE SECTIONS PASSED AT THE CONFERENCE

Note: Voting figures are given both for the whole Conference and for official church delegates only. (A separate vote by the latter was taken only in the case of resolutions addressed to the member Churches). The total in favour of each resolution is not stated, only abstentions and votes against. The total of conference members eligible to vote was 474, of whom 329 were official church delegates.

SECTION I—FAITH

We ask our Churches:

1. To recognise the overwhelming importance of that in the Christian faith which unites us, and to act upon it.

VOTE: Conference: unanimous
Official delegates: unanimous

2. To discuss all questions of faith in the awareness that the questions which the world is putting to Christians about their faith are as searching as any questions which Christians put to one another.

VOTE: Conference: 6 against, 2 abstained
Official delegates: 1 against, none abstained

3. To accept that, while we affirm standards of belief to be an essential element in the life of the Church, our remaining differences concerning the use of these standards, and concerning the relation between Scripture and Tradition, though important, are not sufficient to stand as barriers to unity. They do not separate us at the point of the central affirmation of our faith, and they can be better explored within a united Church.

VOTE: Conference: 20 against, 8 abstained
Official delegates: 18 against, 8 abstained

SECTION II—WORSHIP

1. In view of the remarkable degree of unanimity which we have found on the first principles of Christian worship, we recommend that future work on liturgical revision carried on by member Churches of the British Council of Churches should be undertaken in common or in close consultation.

VOTE: Conference: unanimous
Official delegates: unanimous

2. In view of the rapidly developing relations between the Churches, we ask all member Churches of the British Council of Churches to re-examine and clarify their practice and regulations about intercommunion or open communion, and to reconsider the theology which underlies them.

VOTE: Conference: unanimous
Official delegates: unanimous

3. The fact that the convergence of views which we find among us is not yet shared by many of our congregations, points to an urgent need for more education both of ministers and lay people in contemporary and ecumenical liturgical developments. It is also imperative that material for congregational worship should be made more generally available by special publication. We recommend that the British Council of Churches should regard the preparation of such material, and the encouragement of such education, as a matter of the first importance.

VOTE: Conference: 1 against, 8 abstained
Official delegates: no separate vote—resolution addressed to Council

4. We would urge all Churches to encourage bold and informed experiments in worship, and to stimulate co-operation in such action at the local level. We would ask the British Council of Churches to ensure that information about such experiments and relevant material should be made readily available.

VOTE: Conference: 2 against, none abstained
Official delegates: 2 against, none abstained

5. We further ask the British Council of Churches to ensure that, before a future major conference, serious consideration be given to making such experiments at that conference.

VOTE: Conference: 10 against, 24 abstained
Official delegates: no separate vote—resolution addressed to Council

SECTION III—MEMBERSHIP

1. We request the British Council of Churches to convene forthwith consultations between member Churches concerning the varied doctrines and practices of Christian initiation and the problems arising out of them for the member Churches, with a view to action.

VOTE: Conference: unanimous
Official delegates: unanimous

2. We request the British Council of Churches to re-examine, in consultation with the National Sunday School Union, the Scottish Sunday School Union and similar bodies, the possibility of extending the work of the existing Education and Youth Departments of the Council so as to cover the member Churches' education of children up to the age of fifteen.

VOTE: Conference: 5 abstained
Official delegates: no separate vote—resolution addressed to Council

SECTION IV—MINISTRY

We regard it as an urgent matter that the British Council of Churches and member Churches should at once consider the possibility of ecumenical education for the ministry, and should particularly consider both the proposition to set up an ecumenical college, and other ways of associating the Churches together more closely in theological education.

VOTE: Conference: 1 against, 4 abstained
Official delegates: none against, 4 abstained

SECTION V—IN EACH PLACE

- A. 1. United in our urgent desire for One Church Renewed for Mission, this Conference invites the member Churches of the British Council of Churches, in appropriate groupings such as nations, to covenant together to work and pray for the inauguration of union by a date agreed amongst them.

VOTE: Conference: 5 against, 12 abstained
Official delegates: 5 against, 8 abstained

2. We dare to hope that this date should not be later than Easter Day 1980. We believe that we should offer obedience to God in a commitment as decisive as this.

VOTE: Conference: 53 against, 18 abstained
Official delegates: 41 against, 14 abstained

3. We urge that negotiations between particular Churches already in hand be seen as steps towards this goal.

VOTE: Conference: none against, 8 abstained
Official delegates: none against, 7 abstained

4. Should any Church find itself unable to enter into such a covenant we hope that it will state the conditions under which it might find it possible to do so.

VOTE: Conference: none against, 6 abstained

5. Since unity, mission and renewal are inseparable we invite the member Churches to plan jointly so that all in each place may act together forthwith in common mission and service to the world.

VOTE: Conference: 2 against, 1 abstained
Official delegates: 1 against, none abstained

- B. Recognising that visible unity will only be realised as we learn to do things together both as individuals and as congregations, this Conference invites the member Churches of the British Council of Churches to implement the Lund call to 'act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately'. In particular it requests them:

1. to make every effort to promote the common use of church buildings and to set up whatever machinery is necessary to implement this;
2. to declare that the following activities should be carried out jointly or (where this is not possible for deep reasons of conscience) co-ordinated, namely: 'learning together' (including local ecumenical study-conferences and Faith and Order groups), lay training, youth work, children's work, men's and women's organisations, local church publications, Christian Aid, programmes of visiting, concern for and service to the whole life of the local and wider community;
3. to designate areas of ecumenical experiment, at the request of local congregations, or in new towns and housing areas. In such areas there should be experiments in ecumenical group ministries, in the sharing of buildings and equipment, and in the development of mission.

(Note: Resolution (B) incorporates one on similar lines from Section III on Membership).

VOTE: (on B. 1, 2, 3): Conference: unanimous
Official delegates: unanimous

B. *ADDITIONAL RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE CLOSING SESSION ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18th, 1964*

1. That the Conference requests the British Council of Churches to consider how the member Churches, and any others willing to join in, may best make a concentrated, comprehensive and united effort to learn how we may communicate the Gospel to our people in a way that they can hear and understand; and to make plans for action. (proposed by the Revd. David M. Paton)

VOTE: Conference: *nem. con.*

Official delegates: no separate vote—resolution addressed to the Council

2. Believing that the time has come for ecumenical initiative at diocesan or other appropriate level, this Conference invites the English member Churches to co-operate with the British Council of Churches, as a matter of priority, in creating the necessary inter-denominational machinery at this level to promote united planning and action; to co-operate with local Councils of Churches and, in particular, to follow up the concerns of this Conference as set out in its reports and resolutions, pledging the resources to make them effective. (Proposed by the Revd. M. A. Reardon)

VOTE: Conference: unanimous

Official delegates: no separate vote—resolution addressed to the Council

3. To the member Churches of the British Council of Churches: Where negotiations for union are taking place between member Churches of the British Council of Churches, we urge that the practice of inviting observers from sister Churches of the same tradition in the other national areas should be more consistently followed.

VOTE: Conference: 2 against, none abstained

Official delegates: 2 against, none abstained.

Appendix II

REPORT ON THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE
NOTTINGHAM FAITH AND ORDER CONFERENCE
ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE BAPTIST UNION,

9th March, 1965

1. As requested by the Council at its meeting in November, 1964, the Advisory Committee on Church Relations considered the report and resolutions of the Faith and Order Conference held at Nottingham in September, 1964, under the auspices of the British Council of Churches, and presented the following comments and recommendations which were adopted.
2. The Nottingham Conference was the first of its kind to be held by the British Churches and directed to the Church situation in the British Isles. The phrase "One church renewed for mission", the title of one of the preparatory booklets, proved an influence and impetus throughout the discussions. Its character and conclusions must be seen, however, in relation to the Faith and Order discussions of the past forty years, the Ecumenical Movement in general, and the conversations and negotiations between particular Churches which are currently in progress.
3. There were at Nottingham 28 Baptists connected with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland (12 of them members of the B.U. Council) 3 members of the Baptist Union of Scotland and 2 members of the Baptist Union of Wales. Only one of the 25 sub-sections into which the Conference was divided for the purpose of discussion was without a Baptist participant.
4. The accounts given by those present at Nottingham, and the printed report *Unity Begins at Home*, leave no doubt that the Conference was a very significant occasion and that the challenging series of resolutions was the result of a strongly emerging consensus of opinion, to which the periods of worship and the Bible study made important contributions.
5. The Committee believes it to be vital that the resolutions and what lies behind them be sympathetically considered not only by

the B.U. Council but also by the denomination as a whole. Baptists are almost alone among the Churches in membership with the B.C.C. in not being directly involved at the present time in any conversations with another denomination (with the exception of the discussions which have begun in Wales). It seems to be inevitable that before long Baptists give clearer indication than they have so far done as to their attitude to some of the major questions involved in the movement for greater unity among the Christians of this and other lands. That there are considerable divergencies of view among Baptists makes it the more important that they study and face together the questions raised at Nottingham.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. In view of this the Committee recommends that the Council empower it to prepare a comprehensive statement to help clarify and shape British Baptist opinion and policy regarding both the changing pattern of Church relations in the British Isles and the more general question of Christian unity; and to ensure by careful consultation that the statement takes account of the different theological and ecclesiastical opinions within the denomination. To assist with this the Committee recommends the Council to invite Association Committees and Fraternalists to consider the resolutions of the Nottingham Conference and to communicate their findings to the Committee.
7. On the resolutions passed by the Nottingham Conference, the Committee makes the following detailed but not exhaustive comments:
 - (a) We are not able to accept the view (Section I. 3.) that the differences between the Churches concerning the use of standards of belief and concerning the relation between Scripture and Tradition are now insufficient to stand as barriers to unity. Baptists as a whole would not, we believe, be yet ready to agree that the differences on these matters can be better explored within a united Church. We believe, however, that Baptists should themselves carefully re-examine their own and others' attitude to these matters and share further discussion about them.
 - (b) We believe it to be important that Baptists again consider the questions of open and closed membership and open and closed communion, on which the Council issued a report in 1937, but that closer attention is needed to the theological issues involved (Section II. 2.) This would be, we believe, Baptists' best contribution towards the further study of the practice and regulations

about inter-communion and open communion which the Nottingham Conference desired.

(c) We trust that Baptists will be fully represented in the recommended consultations concerning the varied doctrines and practices of Christian initiation (Section III. 1.) and that they will share with others in the consultation with sympathy and a recognition of the problems which face all the Churches in this field.

(d) We recognise that the resolutions (Section V. 1, 2) regarding "unity by 1980", which have received much publicity and have met with reactions both favourable and unfavourable, are to be understood in the light of the New Delhi definition of "the unity we seek". That definition was as follows:—

"We believe that the unity which is both God's will and His gift to His church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all, and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls His people".

At New Delhi it was made clear that this definition describes a goal about whose interpretation and means of achievement there is as yet no common mind. It was further explicitly stated that "unity does not imply simple uniformity of organisation, rite or expression". We believe that the majority of Baptists would be in sympathy with the definition. Clearly, however, much further thought is needed by all as to its implications. We recognise also that the setting at Nottingham of a definite date was a deliberate attempt to sharpen the challenge and has already had a greater effect than would have followed any indefinite statement such as "as soon as possible". We are willing to enter into joint discussions on the form and content of the proposed covenanting to work and pray for the inauguration of union by an agreed date, as in its present form the Nottingham resolution is too vague.

We hope that the statement referred to in paragraph 6 above would provide an answer to the challenge that any Church unable to enter into the suggested covenant should state the conditions under which it might find it possible to do so. (Section V. 4.)