

English Reformation. Canterbury was never at ease with Wittenberg, Zürich, or Geneva : she found in Strasbourg what she never saw in others. She found a theology firm against Rome yet kindly firm ; a theology firm against Puritanism and Radicalism, but equally kind ; a theology that breathed in the pure Gospel, unadulterated, unpolluted. It was a scholarly, reasonable, reformed, evangelical catholicism.

Bucer was at home in Wittenberg, Zürich, Geneva, and knew intimately and personally the lives and works and thinking of the great Reformers. He was not only a conciliator between the Lutherans and the Swiss but a reconciler of all those of south-west Germany who were neither Lutheran nor Swiss. He almost reconciled Roman Catholic Cologne with Protestantism. He was a theological bridge between the ferment of the Continent and the insularity of England. Stupperich's insistence (though he is not alone in this) that Bucer stands in his own right as a Reformer, may well prove to be justified when the world has the texts of Bucer's works.

## Mutual Responsibility

BY G. E. DUFFIELD

**B**Y the time this article is printed a year and a half will have elapsed since the Toronto Congress. The Congress itself is almost forgotten, but not so the document *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ*, popularly known as MRI. Strictly speaking this document, which only takes up eight small pages, originated at the Huron Conference immediately prior to Toronto, but it is popularly referred to as the Toronto document, and it is certainly the chief legacy of Toronto.

As with Toronto itself, so with MRI, reactions varied. It was not long before the returning delegates were complaining in the correspondence columns of the church press that those who did not go were largely apathetic. Perhaps it was true ; perhaps Mr. Ivor Bulmer-Thomas was right when in the course of the Church Assembly debate he described the Toronto message (not MRI) as "inanity upon inanity". But in any case it is the way of people returning from what they take to be an exciting conference to complain about the lukewarmness of others. Much more serious criticism of MRI appeared in the correspondence columns of *The Times*, where MRI's ecumenical implications were challenged. The MRI debates in Church Assembly have never reached great heights, and somehow enthusiasm has been lacking. In the course of these debates criticism came from evangelical laity, and as one of the critics I am grateful for this opportunity to explain what I feel to be the weaknesses of MRI.

The fact that I remain critical does not mean that I think all in MRI bad. If the effect of MRI is to shatter the missionary complacency of many Anglicans, to turn them from that excessive parochialism which insists on spending the additional money from a stewardship campaign on some inessential luxury in the parish without a thought for Christians elsewhere, that will be great gain. And though most evangelical parishes have a missionary record of which they can be proud, evangelicals are by no means entirely immune from such parochialism. Already the very fact of MRI's existence has meant that some parishes which normally think little of missionary work have now been jolted—often uncomfortably—into doing so. That too is gain.

Of those who were already interested in missionary work before MRI existed, which of us can honestly say we did not look upon our African and Asian brethren with a measure of condescension? That sort of attitude MRI has very properly challenged. We must no longer think of "giving" and "receiving" churches, but as Christian brethren helping each other as needs arise. And if we are tempted to feel this a mere verbal distinction which does not alter the facts of the situation, we may be right for the moment while we are thinking of finance only, but who will deny that the enthusiasm of the African Christian is not an ever-present rebuke to the senility and smug complacency of so much European and North American Christianity. It would be arrogance to suggest that we westerners had nothing to learn from the Christians of Africa and Asia. If MRI helps encourage a new attitude among us, that too will be gain.

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But when we have frankly recognized and appreciated the good points of MRI, there remain other disturbing features, of which I shall discuss three. First, and most important, the ecumenical implications. Let us start with the title *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ*. That would surely lead anyone familiar with the biblical metaphor of the body to think that a discussion of the Church was to follow. But it is not so. Apart from two small asides which read like afterthoughts, the document is exclusively about Anglicans and the Anglican Communion. I do not think this was intended to be a sort of Anglican equivalent to the Roman and Orthodox exclusivist claims, though I can understand some non-episcopalians who are constantly having bishops pushed at them thinking so. The subsequent concern of Anglican officials to recognize and seek to rectify the unfortunate implications is proof of their ecumenical good faith. Nevertheless, placed in the context of all that is going on in Christendom today, the relationship between the title and the content of MRI does seem to reflect the subconscious assumptions of current official Anglicanism. This official Anglicanism seems unable or unwilling to extricate itself from pan-denominational, pan-episcopalian Anglican Communion thinking. In fact its exponents do not seem to show the inclination for the drastic rethinking which in MRI they are urging on others.

Anglican Communion apologists in Church Assembly and elsewhere often say that we cannot abolish the Anglican Communion overnight

and that therefore we ought to work through it, but this is not really question, for I am not aware that anyone ever thought it could be abolished overnight or even in a year or so. The issue is rather whether we should continually strengthen the organization of the Anglican Communion into an exclusivist world denomination with its growing bureaucracy, its central episcopal gatherings, etc., or whether the Communion should be dissolved gradually and the Anglicans in each area encouraged to join with other Christians there who maintain the essentials of the biblical Gospel and so form *the* Church of that locality without any particular label. The issue is basically a biblical one. Which is more in keeping with the biblical doctrine of the Church—a worldwide denomination controlled by bishops, a sort of Gallicanism, or a series of autonomous local churches working together in some sort of loose federation as occasion arises? We cannot go into the question as to what are the essentials of the Gospel, but we can say that they can only include what is demonstrably biblical. If we want a convenient summary, we might do a lot worse than take the XXXIX Articles (minus the domestic ones at the end).

Not long ago the Rev. Barry Till wrote *Change and Exchange* (Church Information Office, 181 pp., 5s.), a book which amounts to a semi-official exposition of MRI in view of the publisher and Mr. Till's position on the important MECCA (Missionary and Ecumenical Council of the Church Assembly) committee. In his book Mr. Till recognizes the ecumenical problem and the criticisms of those who think the local church is basic, yet both in his book and in an article in *Theology* (November, 1964) he argues that those who believe this are inclined not to be aware of the wider geographical and ecumenical involvement of the Church. Thus in the *Theology* article he cites Paul's collection for the impoverished saints in Judea as an example of concern beyond the local church to Christians in other lands. This Mr. Till implies vindicates the MRI principle. If it was simply a case of parochialism versus a wider vision, we might be inclined to agree, but it is not. Mr. Till is concerned in that article to reply to criticisms on the ecumenical front. In fact the very example he cites could hardly be more damaging to his argument, for it proves the exact reverse! Evangelicals who believe the local church to be basic have never lacked a vision that the whole world should be won for Christ. If they had lacked this vision, they would never have been so industrious in missionary causes. But Paul's collection was for Christians *without distinction*. The only distinction there was that one group were "haves"—albeit on a modest enough scale—and the others were "have nots". There was no question of denominational pedigree or only helping some kinds of Christians. It is certainly true that nothing parallel to the modern denominational overlap existed in New Testament times, but the problem was present in essence. There was a constant danger of a split between Jewish and Gentile Christians as we know from Galatians, from the circumcision controversy, and elsewhere. The parallel Mr. Till would require to prove his case would be to discover in the Bible an exclusively Jewish-Christian aid programme or an exclusively Gentile-Christian one. But that cannot be found, and it is clearly in contradiction to the whole tenor of the Bible.

The underlying question in this controversy is where does our first allegiance lie. Is it to those of the same denominational family right across the world, or is it to those who preach the same Gospel, for the two are certainly not of necessity the same? If there is need in an area the Christians elsewhere have a duty to help. When the need is something like that in an earthquake disaster, it is of course a matter of helping humanity generally. But when the need is for a church school or a mission station or a theological college, the question to ask is not about the denominational tag, but whether the object of the aid will promote and proclaim the biblical faith. If it is teaching heresy or sectarianism, Christians should not support it whatever the label. But heresy is not confined to the wilder excesses of groups like Alice Glenshina's church. Teaching the mass is heresy just as much as denying the deity of Christ, for both undermine the Gospel of justification by faith alone. The only test we are entitled to require is whether the church in question is loyal to biblical essentials. It is quite wrong to insist on denominational shibboleths or our own peculiarly English ways of doing things. MRI has rightly denounced the latter, but seems to have failed to recognize the former, which is if anything a more insidious form of western ecclesiastical imperialism than anything known in the Victorian era.

To argue like this will doubtless make some scratch their heads, and when they have made due allowance for charity they will wonder if we can possibly be Anglicans in reality and by conviction. The answer to them is that this is the truest form of Anglican loyalty because it is in keeping with biblical principles (e.g., the principle of the area church) and with historic Anglicanism. It is one of the saddest of ecumenical developments that Anglicanism—in its current official presentation—is becoming more and more synonymous with episcopacy, and only a certain type of episcopacy at that. That is a latter-day novelty and should be recognized as such. We have only to reflect on the very name Church of England. It is the church of the country. You can take Christianity from one country to another, but you cannot take the church of a particular country and implant it in another. That would be intrusion. It thus becomes the most loyal form of churchmanship to join in with the Christians of the locality provided they are sound on the biblical essentials and have not unchurched themselves by denying these. Elsewhere I hope to develop this principle more, but here it is at least stated in outline. The basic premise is that in a missionary situation an Anglican's first loyalty is to those who preach the biblical Gospel, not to those who share a particular—and in a missionary situation largely meaningless—denominational label. What matters in Asia or Africa is helping the Christians on the spot, not asking questions about which brand of Western Christendom they came from originally. It is because MRI runs counter to these principles that many evangelicals are lukewarm if not critical about it. While it does not appear that Anglican officialdom has yet fully realized that their criticisms are, they can at least be grateful that the Church of South India has been brought into MRI. That shows a slightly wider vision. The truth of the matter seems to be that though official spokesmen have done all they can to meet ecumenical objections, the

MRI project was wrongly conceived in its pan-Anglican origins.

The new Wider Episcopal Fellowship is hailed by some as a great ecumenical advance, but is it really so? Why does everything have to be so rigidly episcopal? Episcopacy as a pastoral ideal has a lot to commend it, but a certain type of episcopacy is always required. Thus the Methodists in America and the Reformed Christians in Hungary, both of whom have a pastoral episcopacy, are excluded. The insistence on this sort of episcopacy is nothing short of sectarianism, and I fear it seems to be the subconscious basis of much Anglican thinking. Looking at this sort of phenomenon, it is small wonder that many evangelicals are sceptical about the much vaunted ecumenical progress. They have been used to working alongside of their Protestant brethren in missions like the CIM, and when they are told of ecumenical progress, all they can see is denominational barriers going up with alarming rapidity.

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The first criticism of MRI was ecumenical and I have dealt with it at length as it is the most basic, but the second is not unrelated. It concerns centralization. We all know there has been an enormous growth in centralization in Anglicanism. In England more and more matters are dealt with by Church Assembly boards. Stewardship has largely taken giving out of the hands of the individual and put it into the hands of the PCC. The Paul Report bids fair to centralize and regionalize patronage, and now MRI makes at least two contributions to the pattern of centralization. First, control from the Lambeth curia. While Lambeth conferences are careful to disclaim any legislative authority, can anyone seriously doubt that at the present moment Lambeth controls policy behind the scenes? Sometimes they direct policy outside the Anglican Communion such as when Lambeth turned the Nigerians against a CSI style reunion scheme. Now MRI is to give the Lambeth curia a secretariat, and once again we must ask whether it is unduly cynical to think that one of the main functions of these new executive officers will be to sell official Anglican policy. They are in fact salesmen in thin disguise. Mr. Till admits in his book that the planners are usually bishops. Disclaimers of legislative authority amount to nothing as we all know how the alleged spiritual and moral authority of the Convocations has been played up against the legislative authority of the land in matters like vestments and open communion. Such activities are really a thinly veiled mixture of clericalism and anarchy.

Secondly, those who read the signs of the times cannot be unaware of pressure to amalgamate missionary societies. When a phalanx of low church bishops get up in Church Assembly to sell this line, the meaning is clear. It is official policy and they are afraid of evangelical opposition. The UMCA-SPG merger is hailed as a great step forward, and we are asked to work for one Anglican missionary society. This, it is said, will avoid competition and rivalry (does any exist?—no one ever gives any evidence). It is said to be more economical, which is debatable. It is said that people will give to *the* Anglican missionary society, whereas they will not give to societies with particular viewpoints.

Perhaps that is true of some, but folk seem noticeably cool about *the* Church Assembly budget. And many an incumbent will testify to the interest aroused locally in a particular person, a particular area, or a particular society. That might not continue with one centralized body.

But there is a more basic reason for opposing wholesale mergers. The history of Anglican missionary endeavour is strewn with examples of opposition to missionary advance from official ecclesiastical quarters, and often accompanied by dislike of what used once to be called evangelical "enthusiasm". In his book, Mr. Till mentions East India Company opposition, but perhaps discretion prevented him mentioning the greatest source of opposition—the bishops. We have only to reflect on the consequences of their opposition to Wesley and his American missionaries, or the disturbance Bishop Selwyn caused in the happy intercommunion between Anglicans and Methodists in nineteenth century New Zealand. There was no problem till he came along! History warns us against allowing all Anglican missionary work to be controlled by bishops, for that is what one society would in effect mean. I am not at all sure the pass has not already been sold here when missionary societies agreed not to launch out on new programmes unless they are in the Executive Officer's Programme of Advance (Till, p. 109). I was one of those who originally spoke in favour of the establishment of MECCA when it was debated in Church Assembly, but the juxtaposition of this development with MRI has made me wonder increasingly if evangelicals will not have to pull out. I do not of course expect anything to happen for a while yet, but what will occur when evangelicals want to launch out on a programme which lacks official blessing or even goes against official policy? Will the screws then be tightened? Have evangelicals sold their independence in missionary work? I am not sure of the answers here. I am just thinking aloud, but they are important questions.

It has to be admitted, I think, that the more definitely evangelical missionary societies have been caught unprepared by the rapid developments on the ecumenical front. They hardly abound in men of theological vision or of ecclesiastical statesmanship. Most are served by devoted Christians who are greatly concerned to see men won for Christ, but who have suddenly found themselves in a new world of ecumenical statesmanship. It is rather painfully obvious that many of them are right out of their depth. This situation is one example of the less desirable sort of evangelical conservatism. The future of these societies largely depends on how quickly they are willing to set their houses in order.

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Thirdly, MRI gives the impression that Anglicans have suddenly got to change everything. Now he would indeed be shortsighted who did not realize the church needs some adaptation to the new moods of society around her, but in the present low spiritual state of English churches it is perilously easy for depressed Christians who find the going hard to jump at any new idea which in the short run may appear to help, but in the long run may hinder or damage. At the moment the Church of England has far too many revolutionary schemes on hand.

It cannot think them all out at once. It is fatally easy to imagine that simply having a new Prayer Book, a new Bible translation, a shake up in clerical deployment, a merger with the Methodists, and a few other changes will solve our problems. These things will not solve them, for the real problems are elsewhere—intellectual and theological muddle in the churches, though things are better now than between the wars—low standards of godliness in the church—a spiritual poverty in prayer and worship. Somehow the power of the Holy Spirit seems to have left us, and it will not be brought back by numerous ingenious schemes, worthy though they may be of themselves. Things will come right again only when the Spirit of God revives the church. And if this seems rather obvious and trite, I mention it because there seems to me an increasing danger for people to imagine that if only we could engineer enough of an adventurous spirit and get past the innate conservatism of most religious folk, all would come right. Such dreamers are in for some bitter disillusioning, but that is another matter.

To summarize, MRI will perform a valuable function if it stirs people to think more about missions and to act on their thoughts. It will do good if it teaches us all to think of African and European, Asian and American as brethren and equal partners. But it will do immense harm if it further entrenches pan-Anglicanism. Anglican spokesmen have gone some way to meet ecumenical criticisms and for that we can be grateful, but will they have vision and courage enough to take a more drastic course and rethink their whole concept of Anglicanism? One wonders if courage will fail them. Will they accept the local or regional church as the unit and abandon their denominationalism? Will they accept that the primary allegiance is to those who preach the same Gospel, not to an ecclesiastical tag? Will they check the centralization trend and rekindle the initiative and vitality of the local church? Will they go further and urge the Church to pray for revival and renewal? Or will they concentrate on marvellous new schemes each more radical than the last? These are large questions and on the answer to them will depend the position of the Church of England and other Anglicans during the next decade and more.

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