

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

# One Body in Christ

## The Doctrine and Expression of Christian Unity

BY J. I. PACKER

**O**UR aim in this essay is to focus the biblical notion of the unity of the Church, and draw from it some lines of approach to current questions about the uniting of churches.

The theme is hackneyed, no doubt. Our era has seen a flood of writing on it already. For fifty years the world Church has concentrated on problems of unity in a quite unprecedented way. This has been due to several converging factors. First, there has been a steady build-up of external pressures against the Church's mission. Our world continues to shrink, and to absorb in every continent the cultural patterns of the "secular cities" of the West. The Communist bloc has put up the shutters against Christianity, and the old Eastern faiths, revitalized by nationalism, have grown strong, while by every outward standard of reckoning the Christian tide has ceased to flow in Afro-Asia and is ebbing in the West. In an age which knows the power of centralized administration and big technological battalions, as seen in the industrial empires of the West and the totalitarian régimes of the East, the churches, thrown on to the defensive and conscious of their weakness, have come to see today as in a special sense "a time for unity" (to quote the title of the Bishop of Bristol's recent treatment of this theme). United, it is felt, we shall stand, whereas divided we cannot but fall.

One sign of our times is that all over the world members of the older Protestant church families in particular are hopefully looking to union schemes to renew the Church's life. This is disturbing, for neither Scripture nor experience encourages such hopes. The New Testament links revival with the outpouring of God's Spirit to empower the Word, but suggests no connection between this and uniting separated churches; and the witness of history is that, whereas movements of revival have neither presupposed nor produced such unions, no union to date—the Church of Scotland, the English Methodist Church, the Church of South India, or any other—has led to any kind of spiritual awakening. This unpalatable fact should be squarely faced. Whatever fringe benefits union schemes may have brought, they have not so far resulted in any discernible deepening of spiritual life, nor any notable evangelistic advance. However, hope springs eternal in the churchman's breast—is not ecclesiastical optimism a standard counterfeit for Christian hope?—and many are sincerely convinced that our stagnant churches will find in union their elixir of life. Hence thoughts of union bulk large in many minds.

Then, second, modern theology has rediscovered the Church. The consequent redirection of interest has been quite dramatic. The nineteenth century was for Protestant Europe and America an era of

religious individualism, while Roman thought about the Church was wholly institutional, juridical, and authoritarian. But all that has changed. From study of the biblical themes of God's covenant, God's people, and Christ's body, has sprung a new vision of the Church as the redeemed community, a single organism, "visible" by its very nature, and central in God's plan. Realization that the kingdom of God is essentially neither socialism, as liberal Protestants thought, nor ecclesiasticism, as Roman Catholics had assumed, but is the realm of God's saving, subduing, and renewing action, dynamic in character and cosmic in range, has opened a new chapter of thought about the Church's mission and the conditions of its earthly life. Hence has come a new theological interest in unity, as part of God's will for the Church on earth.

What this unity involves, however, is not yet agreed. Easy agreement was never, indeed, on the cards. Participants in the debate have viewed the new insights from conflicting basic standpoints, and have been constantly tempted to assume—as we would all start by doing—that the highroad to unity is for everyone else to become like themselves. Discussion continues, and though the ground is now mostly familiar, old positions have constantly to be re-thought and re-stated. This is what, within its limits, the present essay seeks to do.

\* \* \* \*

We would first call attention to two contrasts between New Testament teaching and our usual way of thinking about the Church.

First : we regularly treat the Church as a topic on its own, a distinct theme for conferences, lectures, and books, to be discussed only in relation to problems of schism and settlement. This in itself is no more improper than is the isolating of any other biblical theme for study; yet we need to remember that the New Testament does something different. Instead of isolating the doctrine of the Church, it integrates it into the doctrine of grace. Its interest in ecclesiology is not institutional, but evangelical. The subject of all New Testament theology, the thing that all the New Testament books are consciously *about*, is the saving work of God in Christ. New Testament teaching is kerygmatic, in the sense of being, first to last, exposition and application of the Gospel of redeeming love. The doctrine of the Church belongs as part of this exposition.

This reflects ultimately the God-centredness of the Bible. If, as is popular these days, we view the Bible from the standpoint of its narrative, as a *drama*, we have to acknowledge the Triune God as author, producer, and chief performer. Or if, in the older manner, we see the Bible as a *message*, "God's Word written", we have to recognize God Himself as its source, subject, and actual speaker. From either standpoint, it would be as absurd to say that the Bible is about the Church as to say that it is about the Middle East. The Bible is about *God*—the Creator redeeming. And when it shows us the Church, the substance of what it is showing us is God's work of redemption—particularly, what older divines called the *applying* of redemption. To study the Christian life—calling, justification, sanctification, conflict, preservation, glorification—is to study the applying of

redemption to individuals ; to study the Church—its nature, notes, life, ministry, sacraments—is to study *the same subject* in its corporate aspect. The doctrine of the Church, as we said, is part of the doctrine of grace. Had Paul been asked the theme of his " Church epistles ", Colossians and Ephesians—or, for that matter, Romans and Galatians, which, as modern expositors recognize, have as good a claim to be called " Church epistles " as have the other two—he would certainly have said : the grace of God in Christ.

Whether the common claim that " the Church is part of the Gospel " is true or false depends how the word " Church " is being used. If it is taken in a " Catholic " sense, to denote a sacramental institute of salvation with a built-in hierarchical structure—a view only attainable in any case by appeal to extra-biblical authority—then the statement is false. It is true, however, when " Church " is defined as the family community of those redeemed, called, and united to God—when, in other words, the Church is *defined in terms of the Gospel*. Our point is that this is how it should be defined, and that its nature and life should be analysed in entire correlation to the work of God in grace as the New Testament sets it forth.

Second : we regularly treat the Church's unity as problematical and uncertain, by reason of the plethora of divisions not merely between denominational groups, but within them as well. (The theological differences between evangelicals and others in the older Protestant bodies, for instance, seem actually to go deeper than any of the differences between these bodies as such.) Here again, however, the New Testament is different. Though the first churches also lacked effective uniformity of doctrine, worship, and government, and though " organic union " in the modern sense was neither known to them nor sought by them, the apostolic writers never saw the Church's unity as a problem. Rather, they proclaimed it as a fact. This shows again how theocentric, evangelical, and, in the sense explained, non-institutional, their thought about the Church was. Our way is to start from the Church as we see it : hence what strikes us is the fact of division, and we wonder in what sense, if any, the Church can be one. This perplexity is reflected in William Temple's half-jocular remark : " I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, and sincerely regret that it does not at present exist ! " At one time it seemed that the ecumenical movement would never rise above this point of view. What it reveals, however, is the imperfect sanctification of our minds, for this is not the apostolic approach. The New Testament way is to start from the cross of Christ, whereby God reconciled Jew and Gentile, bond and free, Greek and Barbarian, male and female, not only to Himself, but also to each other. In the New Testament, therefore, unity is integral to the fact of the Church, and the problem is not how the divided Church can be one, but how the Church can be divided.

" He (Christ) is our peace ", writes Paul, " who made both one . . . having abolished in his flesh the enmity . . . that he might create in himself of the twain one new man, so making peace ; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross . . ." (Eph. 2 : 14 ff.). Jesus Himself had said : " Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold ; them also I must bring, and they shall hear

my voice ; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd " (Jn. 10 : 16)—a thought which John underlined by observing that Jesus was to die " not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one all the children of God that are scattered abroad " (11 : 52). Here is a unity given to the Church by the very acts of redemption and calling. So Paul tells the Galatian Christians " ye are all one man in Christ Jesus " (Gal. 3 : 28). This unity is given and established by act of God ; Christians neither made it nor, in the ultimate sense, can they break it, any more than they can fall out of their Saviour's hand (Jn. 10 : 29 f.). Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1 : 18), and those whom He has baptized through the Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12 : 13, cf. Rom. 12 : 5, Eph. 4 : 4) cannot be severed from that body. " If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body ; it is therefore not of the body ? " (1 Cor. 12 : 15). Like it or not, " all of us, united with Christ, form one body, serving individually as limbs and organs to one another " (Rom. 12 : 5, N.E.B.). The unity of this " one body in Christ " can be ignored and denied, but it cannot thereby be destroyed. Invariably, therefore, the New Testament views the empirical facts of Christian division in the light of the antecedent fact of Christian unity ; not vice versa !

\* \* \* \*

What is the nature of the Church's given and indestructible unity ?

This question is not answered merely by naming factors which are thought to effect unity, or to manifest its existence and safeguard its continuance. Explanations of the Church's unity are often given in terms of common subjection to the Papacy, or the historic episcopate, or " catholic tradition ", or the doctrines of the Protestant confessions, or the authority of the Scriptures. But all such explanations miss the heart of the matter. The items listed could not, in their very nature, be more than outward means and signs of unity. The Church's unity has to be explained in terms of its union with God. The Church is one because Christians share a common relation to the three Persons of the one Godhead—a relation that is common, not merely in the sense of being similar in every case, but in the further sense of being a single, communal relation whereby God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, holds all Christians, every moment, in saving union with Himself. God's relation to the whole Church is numerically one, just as a father's relation to his whole family is numerically one, embracing both the group (" my children ") and each individual within it (" my child "). This unitary action of God causing sinners to stand in His grace is what makes and keeps the Church one, as a glance at the New Testament account of the Church will show.

This account has two focal points, the covenant and the new creation. The covenant idea indicates the Church's continuity with Old Testament Israel, as the inheritor under the " new " covenant of what Israel looked forward to under the " old ". The thought of new creation, by contrast, underlines the discontinuity between the Church's resurrection-life " in the heavenlies " and the Adamic realm of death from which Christ delivered her. The covenant idea speaks of *pledged fellowship* between God and His Church, in faithfulness and love, on the

basis of remission of sins. Complementary to this, the new creation concept speaks of *vital union* between God and His Church through His vitalizing action in raising her from death to a new life of righteousness. With the former notion may be grouped the New Testament's "community" images of the Church, as God's nation, family, city, flock, kingdom, and priesthood, and Christ's bride; with the latter belong its "organic" images of the Church as a vine, temple, body, and man, in Christ. Both these streams of thought (which, of course, come together in both sacraments) testify to the Church's unity. Moreover, both testify to two further facts in connection with this unity—first, that the one Church owes its existence to the sovereign initiative of the one God; second, that the one Church has all its life through the effective mediation of the one Christ. Regarding the first fact, it is enough to observe that the biblical analogue of God's covenant is not a negotiated contract between equals, but covenants of monarchy and marriage, in both of which a unilaterally defined relationship is offered at the discretion of the offerer; while the biblical analogue of new creation is the old creation, which, in the nature of the case, was God's work entirely. Regarding the second fact, we need only note that Christ is set forth, on the one hand, as both heir of God's covenant in its original form (Gal. 3 : 15 ff.) and mediator of it in its final form (Heb. 8 : 6), and, on the other hand, as both "the beginning" of the new creation through His own resurrection (Col. 1 : 18; see C. F. D. Moule *ad loc.*), and also the One in whom "new creation" becomes a reality for us through faith in Him (2 Cor. 5 : 17; cf. Jn. 3 : 3-15; Col. 2 : 10-12). Here, then, is the grace of God in Christ which creates and sustains in being the one Church. When Paul proclaims the Church's unity—"one body, one Spirit . . . one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4 : 4-6)—it is of this grace that he is bearing witness.

A further point must be made here. Paul speaks of "one faith", through which, as he tells us elsewhere, men receive God's grace and actually come to belong to the one Church. What is this "one faith"? Paul's answer certainly would have been: faith in Jesus Christ according to my Gospel—in other words, trust in the person of the Saviour on the basis of certain truths about His work and its effects. So the idea of the Church is of a community which knows God's grace through believing in Jesus Christ, and which knows Jesus Christ through believing specific doctrines about Him. Here is the basis for insisting, as it is necessary (though unfashionable) to do, that the Church is, by its very nature, a confessional body. The common playing-down of faith in doctrines, as if faith in Christ did not require it, is shallow thoughtlessness—indeed, if pressed, it is utter nonsense. Christ is not an unknown "x", but a specific historical personage, now glorified. The notion of faith in Him lacks content till we know those facts about Him which are relevant to our condition, and it is precisely these facts which have historically been called doctrines. In a recent battle of the Joneses,<sup>1</sup> Professor Douglas Jones attacked Dr. D. M. Lloyd-Jones for saying that Christian unity exists only where the

<sup>1</sup> See D. R. Jones, *Instrument of Peace* (London, 1965), pp. 68-73, commenting on D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Basis of Christian Unity* (London, 1962).

central doctrines of Paul's Gospel are believed. This is not so, argued Professor Jones, for belief in doctrines is not the same thing as faith in Christ. But this fell short of the point at issue. That you can have belief in doctrines without faith in Christ was not in dispute. Dr. Lloyd-Jones's thrust was rather that you cannot have faith in Christ without faith in the doctrines of the Gospel. No doubt it is beyond our power to determine how much false doctrine, or how little true doctrine, concerning Jesus is compatible with "justifying faith" in any particular case. No doubt we must be cautious in judging the spiritual state of heretics, knowing that the lapses induced by intellectual besetting sins can be no less astounding than the depths of evil into which the regenerate can backslide. Yet in principle Dr. Lloyd-Jones's position is unchallengeable. Integral to the Pauline concept of the one Church is the notion of a Pauline commitment, confessed in worship, witness, and life, to Jesus Christ as set forth in the Pauline Gospel.

\* \* \* \*

The idea of the Church as a single world-wide community of believers, not divided by their separateness in space and time, one because God is one, and Christ is one, and grace is one, was used by the New Testament teachers to interpret and guide the corporate life of "the churches"—that group of small and obscure communities who confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. The New Testament dignifies each such community as "the church" in its own place, viewing it (as scholars since Hort and Harnack all agree) as a local "outcrop"—P. T. Forsyth's word—of the one Church universal; the Church cosmic in microcosm. We cite some of Forsyth's statements on this point, for no one ever expressed it better than he<sup>1</sup>: "The total Church was not made up by adding the local churches together, but the local Church was made a Church by representing there and then the total Church". "The Church in the town, or in the house of So-and-so, means the total Church as emerging there, looking out there, taking effect there." "The one Church is to the many as England to her counties." "It is not strictly speaking correct to speak of the Corinthian Church, but of the Church of Corinth, as it comes to the surface there. And the Church in a private house was as much *the* Church as the whole Christianity of Corinth. So in the one locality you might have a multitude of Churches with an equal place in the whole Church everywhere." In fact, the New Testament knows only these two applications of the word "Church"—to the one universal Church, as such, and to individual congregations, the twos and threes who, meeting in Christ's name, locally manifest the one Church's life.

Is it right, then, to call a group of congregations a "church", and speak of (say) the Church of England, or the Methodist Church? In principle, one can justify this usage, inasmuch as the banding together of local congregations into a team for mutual aid and more effective evangelism—which is, from one standpoint, every denomination's formal rationale—is itself a characteristic manifestation of the life of the Church universal, no less than is the meeting of a single congregation. But when different families of churches live side by side, in a

<sup>1</sup> *The Church and the Sacraments* (London, 1947 ed.) pp. 65ff.

state of local overlap, yet do not practice regular communion with each other nor exercise active care for each other, and when each congregation is forced by this situation to announce itself, not as *the church* (i.e., the universal Church outcropping) in a particular place, but as the local representative of the Congregational, or Methodist, or Anglican, or Baptist denomination, the position is actually scandalous, for it hides from view the true unity of the one Church of God. In such a situation, all parties are in the same boat, even if the oldest retains its original geographical title and calls itself (say) not "the Anglican Church" but "the Church of England". The logic of the situation turns all the church families involved into denominations and indeed sects *de facto*, whatever they may call themselves. Whatever values Protestant denominationalism may have conserved, and whatever potency for good it may have had, it is in itself a deformed growth, and to seek to eliminate it by regional reunions, so as to manifest the given unity of God's Church, is a positive duty.

When the Reformers and their successors sought to show how New Testament teaching would correct the institutionalist mode of thought which underlay the identification of the Church of Christ with the Church of Rome, they found need to draw an explicit distinction between the Church as *visible* and as *invisible*. This distinction, which goes back to Luther and Zwingli, was a basic element in all Anglican ecclesiology till the end of the Caroline period. In recent years it has been so misunderstood that one hesitates to use it; nevertheless, as long as the mental habits which the Reformers were up against survive (as they still do, and not merely in the Church of Rome), one seems to have no choice. As long as the claim is made that the Church of Christ is essentially a visible community, to be identified with some existing organization or group of organizations, so long will it be necessary to protest that Christ's Church is essentially invisible, and that its identity with existing ecclesiastical bodies cannot in the nature of the case be more than indirect and incomplete.

The persistent mistake about this distinction is to regard it as a distinction between two churches, the thrust of which is to suggest that what appears to be the Church all over the world is not really such, since the "real" Church is somewhere out of sight. On the basis of this mistake, it is assumed that those who hold the "real" Church to be invisible will be indifferent to the organized life of actual local churches, feeling that it does not directly concern them, since these do not constitute the "real" Church at all. Hence ecumenical theologians as a body—with exceptions, notably among the Lutherans—are hostile to the distinction, which they see as a lapse into Platonic dualism tending to inhibit interest in visible union.

But this is a complete misunderstanding of what, historically, the distinction meant. It was drawn, not between two churches, but between two aspects of the one Church—that which it wears to the eyes of men, who see only the appearance, and that which it has to the eye of God, who looks on the heart and knows things as they are, and whose estimate of spiritual realities, unlike ours, is unerring. The distinction does not deny that the one Church, by its very nature, has a visible aspect; it is not, therefore, refuted by the true observation of

H. Burn-Murdoch, that of the 110 occurrences of *ekklesia* in the New Testament all save one (Heb. 12 : 23) denote a community living in this world a visible, identifiable life of continuance in the apostolic fellowship.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the distinction was, and is, simply to clarify three points about the one Church, as follows.

The first point concerns its *nature*. The Church is essentially a fellowship of believers, the totality of those whom Christ has united to Himself through the Holy Spirit. What constitutes the Church is not any of its historical outward features—papacy, hierarchy, succession, or any institutional means of grace—but the actual grace-given reality of faith in the Christ of the Gospel. Faith is primary, because Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins, are primary. But since these primary realities are not in any sense visible to human eyes, the Church which they bring into being cannot be visible either. As Luther insisted, the Holy Catholic Church of the Creeds is an object, not of sight, but of faith. The distinction was thus, in the first place, a protest against all views of the Church which stop short at its formal and external aspects, however correctly these may be conceived.

The second point concerns the *identification* of the Church. Where the Gospel is, faith is, and where faith is, there the Church is, whatever institutions may be lacking; but no group or organization can be acknowledged as the Church while it lacks the Gospel. The Church becomes visible and identifiable, not by flaunting some historical pedigree of ministerial succession, but by professing and proclaiming the apostolic Gospel by word and by sacrament. On this basis the Reformers held, first, that their separation from Rome was no sin, since Rome had effectively unchurched herself by corrupting the Gospel; second, their separation was no breach of the Church's unity, since neither papal government and order, nor any other particular form, was essential to that unity; third, that by recovering their own church-character through their renewed confession of the Gospel the Reformed churches had actually recovered unity, and were now waiting for Rome itself to join their new-found fellowship. The distinction was thus, in the second place, the basis for a defence of the Reformation as a renewal rather than a disruption of the Church.

The third point concerns *membership* of the Church. In the visible Church, as in Old Testament Israel and New Testament churches too, persons may be present whom God sees to have no place there, since their profession of faith, though perhaps orthodox, is "notional" and hypocritical, and their hearts remain hardened against the practice of repentance. Such may, like Simon Magus, have received the sacraments, but not as yet the grace of the sacraments; they still need to be converted, and unless they are converted churchmanship and sacraments will not save them. The distinction was thus, in the third place, a call to churchmen to seek that living faith in the living Christ which the Reformers delineated so vividly, and which alone makes salvation sure.

Much, no doubt, has changed since the Reformers' day. For one thing, Roman theology, albeit with oscillating motion, comes closer to the Gospel nowadays than it was prepared to do in the sixteenth

<sup>1</sup> *Church, Continuity, and Unity* (Cambridge, 1945), p. 29.

century, and this requires some reassessment of earlier attitudes. But as long as Rome—not to mention the Orthodox churches—continues to identify the Church with an ecclesiastical institution, and while Protestant thought on the subject, preoccupied with problems of liturgy and order, remains as institutionalized as it is at present, the visible-invisible distinction will still be needed to make plain the Church's true nature.

\*     \*     \*     \*

What obligations have Christians, and local churches, with regard to the Church's unity? Not to create it, as if it did not already exist, but to acknowledge and express it in every way possible. "*Keep the unity of the Spirit*", says Paul (Eph. 4 : 3). What does this involve? One thing that it involves is the removing of obstacles to the expression of the unity that exists. It is noticeable that the obstacles to which the New Testament constantly points are not institutional, but personal—lack of love, and care, and forbearance; pride and party spirit; unwillingness to maintain liberty for the other man's conscience in secondary matters, even though you judge him to be wrong (Rom. 14 ; 1 Cor. 8). Biblical ecumenism starts with loving your neighbour in your own home church, and twentieth-century ecumenism will prove a hollow sham if it does not start here too. But current interest is focused—dangerously, perhaps—on relations between congregations and denominations in a divided Christendom. Here the prime obstacles to manifesting unity take the form, not so much of lovelessness and jealousy, as of disagreement about the faith to be confessed, and barriers at the Lord's table. What lead does Scripture give in these matters? We close by suggesting three principles which, if our foregoing exposition has been right, would seem to be biblical imperatives for a sound ecumenical policy today.

(1) *We must stop regarding all separations, past and present, as acts of schism.*

The word "schism", which in the New Testament means a needless division in the local church, occasioned, not by disputes about revealed truth, but by arrogance and lack of love (1 Cor. 1 : 10, 11 : 18f., 12 : 24 f.), was in the patristic period applied exclusively to separation, for whatever cause, from the Catholic Church—an act which the Fathers, not distinguishing between the church visible and invisible, equated with separation from Christ and saving grace. Rome maintains this view, though allowing that schism through invincible ignorance may not prove to be damning. Recently, under Anglican guidance stemming from men like T. A. Lacey and O. C. Quick, world Protestantism has embraced the notion that the Church is in a state of "internal schism", and the ecumenical movement has been called an association of "penitent schismatics". But this is surely unhelpful and misleading. It suggests that all our separations, as such, are morally blameworthy and unjustifiable. But this is not so. To separate for truth's sake, at the summons of a biblically enlightened conscience, is not sin. When, without failure of love or respect, men dissociate themselves from their previous church connections in order to be free to obey God, this is not, and never was, schism. It may be their duty—

as the Reformers thought it their duty to break with Rome over the Gospel, and as the Baptist and Independent dissenters of 1662 thought it their duty to stand apart from the re-established Church of England and gather churches according to what they held to be the biblical model. For such separations the word "schism" is a pejorative misnomer, which should be dropped from ecumenical discussion. It can only engender a false sense of guilt about divisions which are rooted in cleavage of principle, and encourage an ungodly attitude of "union at any price". Union between separated churches in the same area is certainly to be sought—after all, as Forsyth said, "union is unity taking effect"<sup>1</sup>—but it may not be bought at the cost of truth, or the compromise of conviction.

(2) *We must practice intercommunion with Christians and congregations of sound faith.*

In 1 Cor. 10 : 16 f., Paul speaks of the Lord's Supper, the communion of the body and blood of Christ, as a means whereby the union of Christians with Christ, and in Christ with each other, is both expressed and deepened. The "one loaf" both evidences and contributes to our oneness in the one body. Fellowship at the Lord's Table is thus a means of maintaining "the unity of the Spirit". Here is the theological argument for an open communion table, from which no adherent of an orthodox Christian body is barred; and it is an unanswerable argument, for to decline to express at the Lord's Table the union which we have with our fellow-believers would actually be a breach of unity. We may regret that the Church of England is so grudging and slow to move at official level in the matter of eucharistic fellowship with non-episcopal lovers of Jesus Christ, but evangelicals can give a lead here, both in welcoming Free Churchmen to our communion services and in communicating with them at theirs, and this we should actively do.

(3) *We must insist that evangelical doctrine is the only proper basis for closer church relations.*

It is commonly said that Anglican unity is "cultic" rather than "confessional", and that the Anglican Communion is not a "confessional" body. It is assumed that this is to its credit; but the truth is the reverse. Basic to the biblical idea of the Church, as we saw, is the thought of acknowledging and maintaining the "one faith". Every church, therefore, should be a "confessional" body. Our historic formularies show that this was our Reformers' ideal for the Church of England. Unhappily, in recent years the Church has appeared to be more concerned about episcopal order than about evangelical faith, and in inter-church negotiations it has been the former rather than the latter which she has stressed as the necessary basis of unity. It is good, no doubt, that we should be in full communion with the Old Catholics, who have the historic episcopate, even though their faith is as yet far from evangelical; but it is deplorable that we should not yet have entered into comparable relations with, for instance, the Church of Scotland. It is hard to say which feature

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 67.

of the 1963 Anglican-Methodist conversations report was the more regrettable, its calculated laxity in handling the authority of Scripture or its assiduity in writing the whole substance of episcopal ordination for Methodist clergy into the Service of Reconciliation. The times, of which these things are signs, call us to right the balance by recovering the historic Anglican awareness that the true and sufficient basis of the unity which closer church relations are to manifest lies not in the realm of ministerial order, but of catholic—that is, evangelical—faith.

## The New Alternative Services

BY JOHN SIMPSON

THE Church of England's Alternative Services, published in December 1965, appear as two books—the *First Series*, a book with the episcopal seal, being "the result of long consideration by the bishops, and of consultation with *some* members of the Liturgical Commission and of the Joint Liturgical Steering Committee of the Convocations of Canterbury and York" (Preface—my italics), and a *Second Series*, which is the production of what are virtually two Liturgical Commissions, the original Commission having been reconstituted, with a large change in personnel, during the summer of 1962. The *Second Series* is undoubtedly the more important and more interesting document, but the *First Series* has a political significance far in excess of its liturgical merit, since it resurrects the debate on controversial material from the 1928 Prayer Book, which, by this *First Series*, the Prayer Book (Alternative and Other Services) Measure 1965 is now extended to cover.

The content of the *First Series* is the 1928 forms of Morning and Evening Prayer, Quicunque Vult, Litany, Baptism, Confirmation, Burial, and Communion; and forms of the Holy Communion and Marriage Service which allow combinations of the 1662 and 1928 rites. In the Holy Communion, those parts of the 1928 rite most frequently in use are permitted—namely, the summary of the law, kyries, proper collects, lections, and prefaces, and the prayer for the Church, though permission for the 1928 Consecration Prayer is withheld, provision being made, in its place, for the "Interim Rite", that addition of the 1662 Prayer of Oblation, or part of it, and the Lord's Prayer, to the 1662 Consecration Prayer. An Old Testament lesson may be inserted (to provide for this the table of Old Testament lessons from the C.I.P.B.C. Prayer Book is printed) and the prayer for the Church may be said as a litany, the response "Hear us, we beseech thee" following each section of the prayer. In the Marriage Service, the 1662 vows may be used in place of those designed in 1928, and a choice of psalms is permitted.