

A SERVICE IN LIEU OF INFANT BAPTISM (1976)

The Committee has, directed by the Conference (*Daily Record* 1975, p.29f), considered the production of a form of service for Thanksgiving and Dedication of a child for use when parents either have conscientious scruples or are unwilling to make the vows of Infant Baptism.

The Committee reports as follow:

- (a) The service of Infant Baptism raises difficulties for some of our people; it is the subject of much informed theological debate; there is at present a wide variety of views on the matter both in the Connexion and outside.
- (b) The pastoral needs of those who are conscientiously unable to present their children for Baptism must be given due consideration.
- (c) Methodist usage is clear. 'Baptism is administered to infants' (*Deed of Union* 33c. *CPD* p.63). 'A solemn obligation rests upon parents to present their children to Christ in Baptism' (Methodist Service Book A2). The action of the Conference of 1975 in adopting the report 'Ministers in Full Connexion and Baptism' (*Agenda* 1975 pp.249-53) confirmed rather than questioned this usage.
- (d) A service authorized by the Conference does not provide the answer in this complex situation. Such services have a function as theological documents. Through them the Methodist people develops its theology and by them others assess what Methodism stands for. To promote, on the authority of the Conference, a service which departs from our usage would be likely to confuse the Methodist people.
- (e) Conscientious scruples must be respected, however, and pastoral considerations met. Individual ministers have considerable liberty. They are free to draw up and conduct services of Thanksgiving and Dedication without Baptism wherever they judge it to be advisable. The existing service *Thanksgiving of Parents after the Birth of a Child* was not intended for this purpose. It is normally used in addition to Baptism and it does not include the element of dedication of the child. Those who wish to conduct a service of Thanksgiving and Dedication without Baptism should not, therefore, use this service. They should also emphasize that the service they conduct is not a substitute for Baptism, which should follow at some later date.

The Committee finds that the production and distribution, with the authority of the Conference, of a service of Thanksgiving and Dedication of a child without Baptism is not advisable at present.

(*Agenda* 1976, p.293)