

RESPONSE TO THE EDINBURGH 'AFFIRMATION OF UNION', AND PROPOSED WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (1938)

The Conference heartily welcomes the unanimous *Affirmation of union in allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ* with which the sessions at Edinburgh were concluded. The Conference would make its own the solemn declaration: 'We are one in faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. We are one in allegiance to Him as Head of the Church and as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We are one in acknowledging that this allegiance takes precedence of any other allegiance that may make claims upon us.' The Conference believes that though the various Churches differ in the outward forms of our life in Christ, and do not wholly agree in their interpretation of His Will for His Church, a renewed and enhanced devotion to Christ as the Redeemer of men will draw us unto that closer unity which we seek.

(ii) The Conference joins in the thankfulness expressed at Edinburgh for the unanimity of the conclusions in the exposition of the doctrine of the Grace of God. The Conference takes especial note of the conclusion that, for the salvation of mankind, 'God bestows His Grace in the Church on its members through His Word and Sacraments, and in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit,' and that though there is a certain difference of emphasis placed upon the Word and the Sacraments, 'such a difference need not be a barrier to union.' The Conference regards the unanimous statement of the Edinburgh Conference that 'there is in connection with the subject of Grace no ground for maintaining division between the Churches,' as a notable advance towards the goal of the unity of the Churches.

(iii) While welcoming the agreements registered in the Report on 'The Church of Christ and the Word of God,' the Conference is convinced that the subject of the Nature of the Church needs more thorough and sustained study than has yet been given to it in the Faith and Order Movement. The differences revealed in the Report on such far-reaching questions as the relation of Holy Scripture to tradition, the basis of Church membership, the relation of the Church to the Kingdom of God, and the mutual recognition of the divided communions of Christendom as belonging to the one Church of God on earth, need further discussion and clarification.

The Conference believes that the differences between the various communions with regard to the Ministry can only be resolved by agreement on this prior question of the Nature of the Church, and once more commends to our own people the statement on *The Nature of the Christian Church according to the Teaching of the Methodists*, adopted by the Bradford Conference of 1937.

(iv) While recognising that there are subjects relating to the nature of the Sacraments that need further discussion, the Conference welcomes the agreements reached about them at Edinburgh, and especially the declaration that 'the Sacraments practised by any Christian Church which believes itself to be observing what Christ appointed for His Church are means of grace to those who partake of them with faith.'

(v) The Conference takes note of the serious divisions manifested, both in the Edinburgh Conference and in its Report, on the question of 'Validity.' The ambiguities inherent in the use of the term arise from different conceptions of the nature of the Church, including the question of the nature of the ministerial office. A greater measure of agreement on these central and determining conceptions must precede agreement on validity.

(vi) In view of the repeated and recent testimonies to the unifying influence of common worship, the Conference re-affirms its conviction that nothing would do so much to realise the unity of the Spirit as fellowship at the Lord's Table between the members of different branches of the Church Universal. The Conference believes that the failure to overcome our division at this point is not only a grave hindrance to progress in our quest for unity but a scandal with immeasurable results in the life of the whole Church of God. It urges that the attention of the Faith and Order Movement be concentrated on possible ways of putting an end to this scandal.

The Conference notes that, both at Oxford and at Edinburgh, a Church has invited all those who have full status in their own Churches to receive the Holy Communion according to the rite of the inviting Church. The Conference welcomes this practice, and urges that it be maintained and extended, especially at gatherings of Christian people united in a common enterprise.

(vii) The Conference gives especial welcome to the following unanimous recommendation of the Edinburgh Conference:

The World Conference of Faith and Order 'urges on all the Churches the desirability of organising and participating in efforts of evangelism in co-operation with Christians of other communions, both as means of bearing effective witness before the multitudes who are detached from Christianity, and as a means of expressing and strengthening that unity in the Gospel which binds together in spiritual fellowship those who owe allegiance to different Churches.'

The Conference recommends our people to take every possible opportunity of putting this resolution into practice.

1. The Conference adopts the following resolutions (*Agenda*, p. 430 and p. 476):

- (i) The carrying out of the proposal that the two Ecumenical Movements ('Life and Work' and 'Faith and Order') should be more closely related, in a body representative of the Churches, and caring for the interests of each Movement, is greatly to be desired, as the Conference believes that the differing problems of each will probably best be solved when we are in presence of the whole situation.
- (ii) The work of these two Movements, and especially of the Faith and Order Movement, is of such importance, and has met with such encouragement, that in the opinion of the Conference the work of the Faith and Order Continuation Committee should be carried on in the freedom hitherto enjoyed, under the conditions suggested in the Edinburgh Conference Report.
- (iii) The Conference sustains the proposal for strengthening the Ecumenical Movement by the formation, if it commends itself to the Christian

Churches concerned in this and other countries, of a World Council of Christian Churches, to bring into closer relation the two great ecumenical movements: 'Faith and Order' and 'Life and Work.'

- (iv) The Conference shares the opinion of the Faith and Order Committee that while the two movements are thus brought together in the proposed World Council of Christian Churches, they should not be merged but that each should continue to have such freedom to carry on its work, as will serve its own distinctive ends. The Conference earnestly hopes that at an early opportunity other ecumenical movements, particularly the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, will be brought into close and organic relations with the proposed Councils.

(Minutes 1938, pp. 70-3)