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# An Outsider Looks at the Church of South India

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In the fifth year since the Inauguration of the Church of South India we look upon a Church which is already taking its own place in Ecumenical circles. It is a Church which has sufficient leaders of note to be invited to other lands to interpret the phenomenon it is to the Christians of those lands, and to take part in the general consultations of Christendom. Is not one of its bishops Chairman of the Committee of 'creative brains' of the World Council of Churches! It is a Church also which attracts visitors from other Churches, so that we of the more humdrum communions of the North half ruefully take the tag ends of the time devoted by these important emissaries, if even we can secure a tag end!

The challenge its very existence offers to the rest of us reminds me of a conversation I had, not long before the Inauguration, with one who is now among the chief of the Church of South India. I had sought reassurance of the wisdom of timing the Inauguration before the reception of the new body by others was clear. I was told that the time had come to cease from talking and to act. So long as there was room for talking, consideration could be endless and the need to make up minds indefinitely postponed. The actual existence of a Church combining episcopal and formerly non-episcopal elements would compel conclusions by that very existence. The Church of South India *is*, and Christians are anxious to know what it is.

My own visits to the South have been for the most part of an official nature to help deal with abnormal situations, and I have not had opportunity of observing the normal functioning of the Church. Those who have, testify to the reality of the union in the councils of the Church. They say that it is impossible in a debate to judge the former allegiances of the speakers. The limits of discussion are the limits of an integrated entity. Such reports are most encouraging and justify the venture of faith which the Inauguration inevitably was. On occasion those of us outside may be tempted to feel that this integration is overstressed and the emphasis on the wider freedom of the Church may inspire a somewhat resentful reaction from those who have not yet made a similar venture. It may also be felt that the definition of relations with the Church of South India which we have been compelled by its existence to make have not been fully appreciated by that Church. In such a definition the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon still distinguished between ministers of the Church, and even those episcopally ordained and consecrated. Such distinction was necessary in our cir-

cumstances and in accord with our varying degrees of relation with other episcopal Churches. We can understand the preference of the Church of South India for a greater degree of equal acceptance, but would ask for a realization that the attitude of the present may be necessary to ensure not only a relation commonly accepted now, but to prepare for one which can be of equal common acceptance in the future, among our own members.

### Doctrine and Liturgical Forms

The existence of the Church of South India has forced minds to be made up on matters still discussed and disputed. In the last five years the orthodoxy of the Church in doctrine has found more and more acceptance. This has come from the clarification of actual statements on doctrine, and in the examination of the liturgical forms issued by the Church. Of course in the circumstances of the union these liturgical forms are permissive, and the members of the Church are still free to use forms in use before the inauguration of the Church, but it is most encouraging that the forms for Ordination, the Holy Communion and Confirmation, which alone have the imprint of the Church as a whole, are such as may be accepted generally as expressive of doctrine which can be generally accepted. In the latter two, there are alternatives, and there would naturally be choice among those alternatives which would produce a form much more acceptable with one selection than the form which would emerge from another, but the essentials are safeguarded whatever alternatives are used. My own impression is that Baptism had the widest diversity of approach before the Union, and will be the hardest nut for liturgical authority in the church to crack. On the other hand the doctrine of Christian Initiation is exercising minds all over Christendom at this time.

If the existence of the Church of South India in forcing minds to be made up has had a favourable issue in the matter of doctrine, this cannot be said to have been so favourable in the matter of the ministry. The reasons for this are several. The thirty year period, during which the ministry will become increasingly episcopal, is not certain at the end of it to lead to a purely episcopal ministry. This has been one of the chief grounds of concern in some Anglican circles. The actual presence in the church of ministries of diverse origin causes anxiety about the privileges of former Anglicans under the pledge in some parts of the Church. As the sense of oneness grows greater, the claim to distinguish between the ministries by members of the Church may become more distasteful, and a kind of moral pressure be felt, even if not intended, to accept all ministries alike for the sake of that sense of oneness. The limit to intercommunion set by the Anglican Communion, though foreshadowed, has been a disappointment to some.

Such considerations have led in the negotiations both in Ceylon and in North India to a desire for a unification of the ministry from the inauguration. The Lambeth Conference of 1948 tended to encourage such an attitude. I would say that Anglicans are especially anxious for this, but those of other denominations also are anxious for a ministry which can win the widest possible acceptance from the beginning, if that is possible without sacrifice of any principle on their part. The problems in this matter are more complex in North India than in Ceylon.

They do not appear insoluble in either. The means provided in Ceylon, as they stand, are capable of wide acceptance, if the temptation to prejudge, by too much definition, the possible action of the Holy Spirit in such a service of unification can be resisted.

It may be asked what the Church of South India is likely to say to such a step. Not much that can be construed as favourable comment has come from South India. This is important as the further hope must be that of a close relation between South India, Ceylon, North India and Pakistan in church order. If the schemes in Ceylon and North India come to successful fruition in this regard, we may have a ministry in these regions of wider acceptance than that of South India, which will complicate future relations. At present it seems too much to hope that the Church of South India would follow the other two by a unification of the ministry within it, and so lead to a ministry of the same degree of acceptance throughout the sub-continent and Ceylon.

### The Church as a Fact

Meanwhile, whatever may happen elsewhere, we have the Church of South India as an incontrovertible fact. At the top the union has gone forward in a remarkable and encouraging way in the short time since the inauguration. That it moves more slowly among the rank and file is to be expected, though from outside it is hard to say how far this may be so. There have been irreconcilable pockets, but since Coimbatore came in these have not been large, except for the Nandyal Area. Even there the augury of happier relations is better. The beginning, with Synodical sanction, of an order for women in South India is a sign for encouragement, and other means of binding the members of the Church more deeply in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit may be expected.

The Church of South India is here, and a factor to be reckoned with in all considerations of Christians on the subject of union. Episcopal and non-episcopal elements have come together. What the future of such a factor may be is hard to discern. It has been both an encouragement and a discouragement to movement towards union elsewhere. As it is, full acceptance of it may be easier among non-episcopal Churches than such a church as the Anglican, though that is not easy for an Anglican to judge. It has been suggested that if union elsewhere is too slow in coming, here is an episcopal church from which others could obtain the episcopate, or with which others could join and so recover the episcopate without direct resort to union with the Anglican Communion, and so lead on to the kind of concordat between churches foreshadowed by the Archbishop of Canterbury's famous Cambridge Sermon. Such a course would lead to overlapping episcopal jurisdictions which would raise yet further problems, and it would need much consideration before it could be judged advisable.

Meanwhile in its internal and external policies the Church of South India must present an object of the closest interest and attention from the outsider. The members of this Church have taken a courageous step, and are set for a sign among us all.