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Editorial Notes

The current issue (February 1960) of *Church Union : News and Views* reports progress in the action of negotiating bodies towards approval of the *Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan*. This Plan, in its third edition, was sent to them in April 1957 for their decision. Readers may be reminded that there are, in all, seven bodies directly concerned with these negotiations. Each of these bodies has its own constitutional procedure to be followed in taking a decision as momentous as the acceptance of such a Plan. It appears however that, of the seven, three have now taken the essential first step towards approval.

The Methodist Church (British and Australian Conferences) was the first to report such a move as long ago as 1958. Their vote will come up for ratification probably within a year. In the meantime, they have further recorded the opinion that they would prefer Union to proceed on the basis of the Plan as it stands, though they would not rule out consideration of amendments if such appeared to be absolutely necessary to others.

In November 1959, the General Assembly of the United Church of Northern India, by a large majority, accepting the recommendation of its Church Union Committee, declared its opinion that the U.C.N.I. may 'enter on a wider union on the basis . . . set out . . . without endangering the evangelical principles for which this Church stands'. The General Assembly also gave due notice of its intention to proceed with the Plan so as to merge the identity of the U.C.N.I. with those other bodies which accept it. This notice will call for ratification at the next meeting of the General Assembly (normally in 1962) and thereafter, if confirmed by the requisite majority in the Church Councils, the U.C.N.I. can go forward. In the meantime the Plan is before all the Councils for their opinion.

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In January 1960, the General Council of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon, with due deliberation, adopted a resolution of 'general approval' of the Plan and referred it to Diocesan Councils for consideration and the passing of resolutions of general approval or disapproval. The General Council also requested His Grace the Metropolitan to refer the Plan to other Provinces in the Anglican Communion, so as to secure their judgement on the question of whether or not they would be in full communion with the united Churches from their inauguration.

These actions open the way to a possible final verdict also in three years' time.

While these actions have been taken by three negotiating bodies, the response of the others is still awaited. During 1959 it was understood that the Methodist Church of Southern Asia would be likely to press for certain amendments before they would proceed to a vote. It is learned, however, that at the meeting of the Negotiating Committee which was held in Jabalpur in December 1959, the request for amendments was withdrawn. This took place after intimation from the Anglican delegation that they would not press for the more far-reaching of certain amendments which they had wished to make, but would request only certain changes, mainly in the Proposed Services, which the Committee approved as not affecting the substance of the Plan. It appears that there has been some delay in the M.C.S.A. beginning to follow their constitutional procedure for a decision, but it seems that the way is now clear for them also to initiate the necessary action.

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As regards the Baptist Churches, it was made clear at the Negotiating Committee, that the statements in the Plan (particularly in the Appendix on the subject) regarding the administration of two alternative practices for Baptism were not regarded as fully satisfactory. As a result, the earlier Baptist recommendation that voting should go forward on the Third Edition as it stands was replaced with a request for a re-opening of some of the issues involved. The Negotiating Committee did not see its way to consider any amendments to the Plan, but asked its sub-committee, already appointed for this purpose, to make a further study of the Appendix concerned with a view to some possible clarification which would help. It is reported that the Baptist Churches in Pakistan have decided not to proceed with the Plan of Union, but the decision of the Council of Baptist Churches in North India, as that of the Disciples and the Church of the Brethren, is still awaited.

Finally we must observe that both the U.C.N.I. and the C.I.P.B.C., in taking their actions, have made public statements of their interpretation of the significance of the proposed act of Unification of the Ministries. Such statements seem to be felt necessary largely to reassure a wider public which might fear that, in entering Union, the Churches concerned had surrendered some vital principles. The statements themselves do not form part of the Plan of Union, which is a Plan for Union by Comprehension which seeks to make room for the heritage of all the negotiating bodies.