

## INTRODUCTION

When seven churches and a few ecumenical bodies decided that the ecumenical way forward in Scotland was to establish a Scottish Churches House, and Dr. Robert Mackie was delegated to seek the interest in the wardenship of Margaret and myself, they had already established the bases of the work of the House. It was designed to enable the churches to address three clamant needs:

The need of the churches to serve the world with integrity, using their lay resources with a new and fresh subtlety and flair; the need for the churches to meet honestly and humbly about the things which separate them and the unity on which they may go forward together; the need for fresh discoveries in the life of prayer and devotion.

To address these objectives in Scotland now had special resources in that the Iona Community's objectives fitted in with those of the House. Members of the Community served in both enterprises. That produced a natural collaboration. This was clearly so with regard to the third, fresh discoveries in the life of prayer and devotion.

In the 'life of prayer and devotion', hymn writing played a large part in both initiatives.

During the first decade of the House consultations held, from 1961 on, encouraged and promoted new hymn writing. The editors of the book 'Duty and Delights Routley Remembered' said that the Dunblane work provided 'the spark which set off the so-called hymn explosion' in the world. A major element in what followed has been the work of the Iona Community's Wild Goose development, where perceptive theology found memorable expression in wording which communicates in song to our time. Prayer had a central role.

The 'need to serve the world with integrity' affirms that the church must always be wary of self-absorption in internal affairs when it is the world that God so loved as to send the Son and services rendered in the world should not have a hidden desire to get ecclesiastical credit i.e. Tommy Cooper style (do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing),

As for 'using their lay resources with fresh subtlety and flair', there is some progress. In the prayer book of the Iona Community reflexion on the first day concerns 'the ministry of the whole people of God'. Yet the direction of church development remains too much top-down, neglecting the resources of the membership which in Scottish Churches House was given scope. According to their competences, church members worked with other equipped people who professed no church allegiance so that they could treat many issues of significance. For instance, Judith Hart, when Secretary of State, faced a difficult obstacle in restructuring the Social Services of Scotland. She asked if Scottish Churches House could take over and try to get the obstacle surmounted. This was done effectively in a consultation of just over two days. The ball was put back in Judith's court. The work could go on with the part played by the House quietly provided, eschewing all publicity, so that the world might be served with integrity.

Now no such instrumentality exists. The move to Alloa, which split the coherence of the ecumenical operation, provides what amounts to a coordinating centre, not designed to tackle work equivalent to that of the House.

At Pentecost, the Spirit descended on *everyone*, provided gifts for different forms of ministry. That is bodied out too little still in church practice.

'The need for the churches to meet honestly and humbly about the things which separate them and the unity on which they may go forward together' is being

thwarted. An answer to Jesus' prayer to the Father, that we all might be one – not in any kind of unity but as he and the Father are one is being replaced by a kind of comradesly apartheid. Lindsey Sanderson, then General Secretary to Action of Churches Together in Scotland wrote in an article to 'Open House'

'there is a paradoxical cosiness in our relating which often results in warm personal relationships and discourages us from holding each other to account for the policies and actions of the churches'.

The image which comes to my mind is of churches going to the starting place of the ecumenical marathon – and then sitting down for a picnic, sharing goodies of their different traditions in great amity – instead of running the ecumenical race. Concentration on local relationships, which has its rightful place as part of the total ecumenical task, becomes a get-out when treated as if any progress of substance could be made without a larger conspectus. If three or four Church of Scotland congregations were to appoint a bishop to take overall oversight of what would then amount to a diocese see if the Assembly would shrug its shoulders. If three or four Roman Catholic churches agreed to make the Mass widely available to Christians of other traditions see if the Vatican would send its good wishes. Concentration on the local by itself avoids attention to critical mutual examination of church policies and practices which is necessary to move towards the oneness with Jesus Christ such as he has with the Father.

The idea that the ecumenical calling is an extra, a trailer which can be unhitched and left in a lay-by in difficult times is a rejection of Jesus' prayer for unity, a betrayal of the gospel. In the end, the church is pictured as a bride going to meet Christ the bridegroom 'without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and without blemish'. It is in history that the blemishes have to be removed. They call for attention now.

Note A small number of copies of this text have been produced in this provisional form. Whether the material will be taken up by a publisher we must wait and see. If that should happen, there would be an interval for me to stand back and give my critical assessment. Also, since theology is done in community, I might get some useful critiques of the material to work on.

