

PRESENTATION TO ANGLICAN CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

[ACC-18]

Accra, Ghana

Thursday 16 February 2023

Brothers and sisters,

It is a very great honour to be with you for ACC-18. I always think it is worth reminding people that Anglicans and Roman Catholics have been committed to walking together and to dialogue for more than half a century. At the international level, we have two major joint commissions: the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission [ARCIC], which engages in theological dialogue, and its younger sibling, the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission (IARCCUM), which aims to enact and embody some of the fruits of that theological work in the life of churches on the ground, principally through pairs of bishops from the two traditions from around the world being commissioned to work more closely together. The Unity, Faith and Order department of the Anglican Communion Office and our Dicastery collaborate in supporting and staffing these commissions. More importantly, perhaps, our two offices, alongside our friends in the Anglican Centre in Rome and the ecumenical staff at Lambeth Palace, stay in regular contact.

In a conversation about *communion*, I think this is important. We are not just disinterested observers. The health and flourishing of your communion matter to us. Division among Anglicans saddens us because as we work towards discovering the unity which is Christ's gift, further division in the Body of Christ is a setback and a wound; but also because, as brothers and sisters who love you, quite simply, your sorrows are our sorrows.

'Communion' is of course understood differently by different people. I had the privilege of attending the Lambeth Conference last summer. It was wonderful in many ways, and it is clear that the opportunity for bishops to get to know one another, pray, and read scripture together was a rich and moving experience. However, the noble efforts to enable the Conference to take place without a major split caused it to feel to this friendly outsider a little bit more like a 'team-building' event than a meeting of bishops. The desire not to appear to be the ruling body of the Anglican Communion was understandable, but it seemed that the bishops were told far too often that the conference had no authority. As the Archbishop has pointed out, the Lambeth Conference is not a synod or council, but when all the bishops of a part of the Church come together, then whether legislative or not, their gathering is more than just a meeting. It is clear that last year's Lambeth Conference was a major event in the life of the Anglican Communion, but maybe the emphasis was excessively *personal* rather than *ecclesial*? It clearly succeeded as an instrument of *friendship*, but perhaps it was less successful as an actual instrument of *communion*? While friendship is part of communion, it is only *part* of it. The proposed work by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity Faith and Order on issues of communion, structure and decision-making in the Anglican Communion that you approved earlier this week is therefore to be warmly welcomed.

I was asked to say a word or two about how communion is understood in the Catholic Church. Anglicans and Catholics have in fact done much good work together over the years on this subject. Though it is now over thirty years old, I commend to you the 1990 document of ARCIC II on *The*

Church as Communion. There is a lot in it to be received – or ‘re-received’ – which might be helpful to the Anglican Communion at this time. It reminds us that *communio* is both horizontal and vertical. It is both baptismal and Eucharistic.

“It is rooted in the confession of the one apostolic faith, revealed in the Scriptures, and set forth in the Creeds. It is founded upon one baptism. The one celebration of the eucharist is its pre-eminent expression and focus. It necessarily finds expression in shared commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church. It is a life of shared concern for one another in mutual forbearance, submission, gentleness and love; in the placing of the interests of others above the interests of self; in making room for each other in the body of Christ; in solidarity with the poor and the powerless; and in the sharing of gifts both material and spiritual. Also constitutive of life in communion is acceptance of the same basic moral values, the sharing of the same vision of humanity created in the image of God and recreated in Christ and the common confession of the one hope in the final consummation of the Kingdom of God. For the nurture and growth of this communion, Christ the Lord has provided a ministry of oversight, the fullness of which is entrusted to the episcopate, which has the responsibility of maintaining and expressing the unity of the churches.” [§45]

The Catholic Church is coming to learn a lot more about the meaning of communion as it lives through the ‘Synod on Synodality’ which is currently underway throughout the world. The meetings of bishops take place in October 2023 and 2024, but the synod itself is a process rather than an event, and has been underway for some time now, first in dioceses, then nationally and currently in continental meetings. It is truly a remarkable ecclesial event. It has also revealed some significant fault lines and tensions in our Church and allowed them to be named and ventilated in an unprecedented way. As we navigate the peaks and valleys - and potholes - of our synodal journey, we have much to learn from Anglicans and many other ecumenical partners about how the faithful’s sense of the faith is discerned and about how the shared responsibility of all for the communion of the Church is stewarded. So, let us continue to pray for one another.

Fr Martin Browne OSB

Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity