

Vatican Responds to ARCIC I Final Report

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"There still remain between Anglicans and Catholics important differences regarding essential matters of Catholic doctrine," the Vatican said in the response it released Dec. 5 to the Final Report of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. The response was developed jointly by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. ARCIC I held 13 sessions during the phase of dialogue from 1970 to 1981, before the 1982 publication of its Final Report. A second commission, known as ARCIC II, was established in 1982. The Vatican's response takes up this question: "Are the agreements contained in (the Final Report) consonant with the faith of the Catholic Church?" The response adds that "what was asked for was not a simple evaluation of an ecumenical study but an official response as to the identity of the various statements with the faith of the church." Among topics discussed in the response are the eucharist, ordination, authority in the church, the papacy, Marian dogmas, apostolic succession, Scripture and tradition. "It seems only right and just" to mention areas "in which notable progress has been achieved" in the ecumenical dialogue, the report states. At the same time, it says its "explanatory note is intended to give a detailed summary of the areas where differences or ambiguities remain which seriously hinder the restoration of full communion in faith and in the sacramental life." The Vatican response follows.

The Catholic Church gives a warm welcome to the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission I and expresses its gratitude to the members of the international commission responsible for drawing up this document. The report is a result of an in-depth study of certain questions of faith by partners in dialogue and witnesses to the achievement of points of convergence and even of agreement which many would not have thought possible before the commission began its work. As such, it constitutes a significant milestone not only in relations between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion but in the ecumenical movement as a whole.

The Catholic Church judges, however, that it is not yet possible to state that substantial agreement has been reached on all the questions studied by the commission. There still remain between Anglicans and Catholics important differences regard-

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ing essential matters of Catholic doctrine.

The following explanatory note is intended to give a detailed summary of the areas where differences or ambiguities remain which seriously hinder the restoration of full communion in faith and in the sacramental life. This note is the fruit of a close collaboration between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, which is directly responsible for the dialogue — a dialogue which, as is well known, continues within the framework of ARCIC II.

It is the Catholic Church's hope that its definitive response to the results achieved by ARCIC I will serve as an impetus to further study in the same fraternal spirit that has characterized this dialogue in the past of the points of divergence remaining as well as of those other questions which must be taken into account if the unity willed by Christ for his disciples is to be restored.

“One can rejoice in the fact that centuries of antagonism have given way to reasoned dialogue and theological reflection undertaken together.”

Explanatory Note

Before setting forth for further study those areas of the Final Report which do not satisfy fully certain elements of Catholic doctrine and which thereby prevent our speaking of the attainment of substantial agreement, it seems only right and just to mention some other areas in which notable progress has been achieved by those responsible for the redaction of the report. The members of the commission have obviously given a great deal of time, prayer and reflection to the themes which they were asked to study together, and they are owed an expression of gratitude and appreciation for the manner in which they carried out their mandate.

It is in respect of eucharistic doctrine that the members of the commission were able to achieve the most notable progress toward a consensus. Together they affirm “that the eucharist is a sacrifice in the sacramental sense, provided that it is made clear that this is not a repetition of the historical sacrifice” (Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine: Elucidation (hereinafter EE), 5); and areas of agreement are also evident in respect of the real presence of Christ: “Before the eucharistic prayer to the question, ‘What is it?’ the believer answers ‘It is bread.’ After the eucharistic prayer, to the same question he answers, ‘It is truly the body of Christ, the bread of life’” (EE, 6). The Catholic Church rejoices that such common affirmations have become possible. Still, as will be indicated further on, it looks for certain clarifications which will assure that these affirmations are understood in a way that conforms to Catholic doctrine.

With regard to ministry and ordination, the distinction between the priesthood common to all the baptized and the ordained priesthood is explicitly acknowledged: “These are two distinct realities which relate each in its own way to the high priesthood of Christ” (Agreed Statement on Ministry and Ordination: Elucidation (hereinafter MOE), 2). The ordained ministry “is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit” (Agreed Statement on Ministry and Ordination (hereinafter MO), 13). Ordination is described as a “sacramental act” (MO, 15) and the ordained ministry as being an essential element of the church: “The New Testament shows that the ministerial office played an essential part in the life of the church in the first century, and we believe that a ministry of this kind is part of God’s design for his people” (MOE, 4). Moreover, “it is only the ordained minister who presides at the eucharist” (MOE, 12). These are all matters of significant consensus and of particular importance for the future development of Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue.

On both the eucharist and the ordained ministry, the sacramental understanding of the church is affirmed to the exclusion of any purely “congregational” presentation of Christianity. The members of the commission are seen as speaking together out of a continuum of faith and practice which has its roots in the New Testament and has developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout Christian history.

When it comes to the question of authority in the church, it must be noted that the Final Report makes no claim to substantial agreement. The most that has been achieved is a certain convergence, which is but a first step along the path that seeks consensus as a prelude to unity. Yet even in this respect there are certain signs of convergence that do indeed open the way to further progress in the future. As the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith pointed out in its Observations of 1982 on the Final Report: “It is necessary to underline the importance of the fact that Anglicans recognize that a ‘primacy of the bishop of Rome is not contrary to the New Testament and is a part of God’s purpose regarding the church’s unity and catholicity’” (cf. Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church II (hereinafter AII), 7). If this is taken with the statement made by His Grace Archbishop Runcie during his visit to Pope John Paul II in 1989 and with reference to infallibility in the Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church II, No. 29, then one can rejoice in the fact that centuries of antagonism have given way to reasoned dialogue and theological reflection undertaken together.

Despite these very consoling areas of agreement or convergence on questions that are of great importance for the faith of the Catholic Church, it seems clear that there are still other areas that are essential to Catholic doctrine on which complete agreement or even at times convergence has eluded the Anglican-Roman

Major excerpts from the Final Report of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Dialogue Commission appeared in Origins, Vol. 11, pp. 693ff. The report’s preface, introduction and conclusion, and its statement on authority all appeared in that edition of Origins, dated April 15, 1982. A letter by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the Catholic co-chairman of the commission also appeared in that Origins edition, pp. 703f. Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, told why the dialogue must continue. He said the congregation regarded the Final Report as “an important ecumenical event which constitutes a significant step toward reconciliation between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church.”

But, he said, “the congregation must also express its view that it is not yet possible to say that an agreement which is truly ‘substantial’ has been reached on the totality of the questions studied by the commission.” Ratzinger wrote:

“In effect, as the report itself indicates, there are several points held as dogmas by the Catholic Church which are not able to be accepted as such or are able to be accepted only in part by our Anglican brethren. Furthermore, some formulations in the ARCIC report can still give rise to divergent interpretations, while others do not seem able to be easily reconciled with Catholic doctrine. Finally, while recognizing that the mixed commission was legitimately limited to essential questions which have been the focus of serious differences between our two communions in the past, one should note that other questions must be examined as well, together and in the same spirit, in order to arrive at a definitive agreement capable of guaranteeing true reconciliation.”

When Pope John Paul II and the former archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, established

the second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission in 1982, they issued a joint statement that appeared in *Origins*, Vol. 12, pp. 49f. "We are agreed that it is now time to set up a new international commission. Its task will be to continue the work already begun: to examine, especially in the light of our respective judgments on the Final Report, the outstanding doctrinal differences which still separate us, with a view toward their eventual resolution; to study all that hinders the mutual recognition of the ministries of our communions; and to recommend what practical steps will be necessary when, on the basis of our unity in faith, we are able to proceed to the restoration of full communion. We are well aware that this new commission's task will not be easy, but we are encouraged by our reliance on the grace of God and by all that we have seen of the power of that grace in the ecumenical movement of our time." The two leaders said also:

"Our aim is not limited to the union of our two communions alone, to the exclusion of other Christians, but rather extends to the fulfillment of God's will for the visible unity of all his people. Both in our present dialogue and in those engaged in by other Christians among themselves and with us, we recognize in the agreements we are able to reach, as well as in the difficulties which we encounter, a renewed challenge to abandon ourselves completely to the truth of the Gospel. Hence we are happy to make this declaration today in the welcome presence of so many fellow Christians whose churches and communities are already partners with us in prayer and work for the unity of all."

See also the "Evaluation of the ARCIC Final Report" by the U.S. bishops' conference in Vol. 14, pp. 409ff.

Catholic Commission.

In fact, the report itself acknowledged that there are such matters, and this is particularly true in respect of the Catholic dogma of papal infallibility, to which reference has just been made. In the section "Authority in the Church II," it is stated that "in spite of our agreement over the need for a universal primacy in a united church, Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgment necessarily attached to the office of bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be known to be assured before their reception by the faithful" (No. 31).

The Final Report recalls the conditions set down for an infallible definition by the First Vatican Council, but goes on to give a different understanding of this question on the part of Catholics and Anglicans: "When it is plain that these conditions have been fulfilled, Roman Catholics conclude that the judgment is preserved from error and the proposition true. If the proposition proposed for assent were not manifestly a legitimate interpretation of biblical faith and in line with orthodox tradition, Anglicans would think it a duty to reserve the reception of the definition for study and discussion" (No. 29).

Similarly, the commission has not been able to record any real consensus on the Marian dogmas. For while "Authority in the Church II," No. 30 indicates that "Catholics and Anglicans can agree in much that the dogmas of the immaculate conception and assumption are designed to affirm," under the same heading it is stated: "The dogmas of the immaculate conception and the assumption raise a special problem for those Anglicans who do not consider that the precise definitions given by these dogmas are sufficiently supported by Scripture. For many Anglicans the teaching authority of the bishop of Rome, independent of a council, is not recommended by the fact that through it these Marian doctrines were proclaimed as dogmas binding on all the faithful. Anglicans would also ask whether, in any future union between our two churches, they would be required to subscribe to such dogmatic statements."

This statement and several others in the Final Report illustrate the need for much further study to be done in respect of the Petrine ministry in the church. The following quotations from the Final Report, while reflecting the more positive approach of Anglicans in recent times in this connection, also illustrate the reservations that still exist on the part of the Anglican community:

"Much Anglican objection has been directed against the manner of the exercise and particular claims of the Roman primacy rather than against universal primacy as such" (Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church I: Elucidation (hereinafter AE), 8).

"Relations between our two communions in the past have not encouraged reflection by Anglicans on the positive significance of the Roman primacy in the life of the universal

church. Nevertheless, from time to time Anglican theologians have affirmed that, in changed circumstances, it might be possible for the churches of the Anglican Communion to recognize the development of the Roman primacy as a gift of divine providence — in other words, as an effect of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church" (AII, 13).

"In spite of our agreement over the need for a universal primate in a united church, Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgments necessarily attached to the office of the bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be known to be wholly assured before their reception by the faithful" (AII, 31).

"The manner in which ARCIC I writes in respect of the role of Peter among the Twelve ... does not express the fullness of the Catholic faith in this regard."

With regard to the magisterial authority of the church, there is a very positive presentation in "Authority in the Church II," Nos. 24-27. We read in fact that "at certain moments the church can in matters of essential doctrine make a decisive judgment which becomes part of its permanent witness.... The purpose of this service cannot be to add to the content of revelation, but to recall and emphasize some important truth." A clear statement is made, moreover, in "Authority in the Church I: Elucidation," No. 3, to the effect that reception of a defined truth by the people of God "does not create truth nor legitimize the decision." But as has been just noted with regard to the primacy, it would seem that elsewhere the Final Report sees the "assent of the faithful" as required for the recognition that a doctrinal decision of the pope or of an ecumenical council is immune from error (AII, 27 and 31). For the Catholic Church, the certain knowledge of any defined truth is not guaranteed by the reception of the faithful that such is in conformity with Scripture and tradition, but by the authoritative definition itself on the part of the authentic teachers.

Dealing with the authority of the ecumenical councils (AE, 3), ARCIC I describes the scope of doctrinal definitions by the councils as being concerned with "fundamental doctrines" or "central truths of salvation." The Catholic Church believes that the councils or the pope, even acting alone, are able to teach, if necessary in a definitive way, within the range of all truth revealed by God.

A further point of difficulty emerges in the position taken regarding the relationship of the ecclesial character of a Christian community and its incorporation into Catholic communion through union with the see of Rome. With references to *Lumen Gentium*, No. 8 and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, No. 13, which are not

fully accurate, the report states: "The Second Vatican Council allows it to be said that a church out of communion with the Roman see may lack nothing from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church except that it does not belong to the visible manifestation of full Christian communion which is maintained in the Roman Catholic Church" (AII, 12). It is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that a church outside of communion with the Roman pontiff lacks more than just the visible manifestation of unity with the church of Christ which subsists in the Roman Catholic Church.

The manner in which ARCIC I writes in respect of the role of Peter among the Twelve — "a special position" (AII, 3), "a position of special importance" (AII, 5) — does not express the fullness of the Catholic faith in this regard. The dogmatic definition of the First Vatican Council declares that the primacy of the bishop of Rome belongs to the divine structure of the church; the bishop of Rome inherits the primacy from Peter who received it "immediately and directly" from Christ (*Enchiridion Symbolorum*, Denz. Schon., 3055; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22). From a Catholic viewpoint, it is not possible then to accept the interpretation given in "Authority in the Church II" concerning the *jus divinum* of the First Vatican Council, namely that it "need not to be taken to imply the universal primacy as a permanent institution was directly founded by Jesus during his life on earth" (No. 11). The Catholic Church sees rather in the primacy of the successors of Peter something positively intended by God and deriving from the will and institution of Jesus Christ.

As is obvious, despite considerable convergence in this regard, full agreement on the nature and the significance of the Roman primacy has not been reached. As Pope John Paul II pointed out during his visit to the World Council of Churches on June 12, 1984, the Petrine ministry must be discussed "in all frankness and friendship" because of the importance of this from the Catholic point of view and the difficulty that it poses for other Christians.

It is clear, as already affirmed, that on the questions of eucharist and the ordained ministry greater progress has been made. There are, however, certain statements and formulations in respect of these doctrines that would need greater clarification from the Catholic point of view.

With regard to the eucharist, the faith of the Catholic Church would be even more clearly reflected in the Final Report if the following points were to be explicitly affirmed:

—That in the eucharist the church, doing what Christ commanded his apostles to do at the Last Supper, makes present the sacrifice of Calvary. This would complete, without contradicting it, the statement made in the Final Report affirming that the eucharist does not repeat the sacrifice of Christ nor add to it (Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine (hereinafter E), 5; EE, 5).

—That the sacrifice of Christ is made present with all its effects, thus affirming the pro-

pitatory nature of the eucharistic sacrifice, which can be applied also to the deceased. For Catholics "the whole church" must include the dead. The prayer for the dead is to be found in all the canons of the Mass, and the propitiatory character of the Mass as the sacrifice of Christ that may be offered for the living and the dead, including a particular dead person, is part of the Catholic faith.

The affirmations that the eucharist is "the Lord's real gift of himself to his church" (E, 8) and that the bread and wine "become" the body and blood of Christ (EE, 6) can certainly be interpreted in conformity with Catholic faith. They are insufficient, however, to remove all ambiguity regarding the mode of the real presence which is due to a substantial change in the elements. The Catholic Church holds that Christ in the eucharist makes himself present sacramentally and substantially when under the species of bread and wine these earthly realities are changed into the reality of his body and blood, soul and divinity.

On the question of the reservation of the eucharist, the statement that there are those who "find any kind of adoration of Christ in the reserved sacrament unacceptable" (EE, 9), creates concern from the Roman Catholic point of view. This section of "Eucharist Doctrine: Elucidations," seeks to allay any such doubts, but one remains with the conviction that this is an area in which real consensus between Anglicans and Roman Catholics is lacking.

Similarly, in respect of the ordained ministry, the Final Report would be helped if the following were made clearer:

—That only a validly ordained priest can be the minister who, in the person of Christ, brings into being the sacrament of the eucharist. He not only recites the narrative of the institution of the Last Supper, pronouncing the words of consecration and imploring the Father to send the Holy Spirit to effect through them the transformation of the gifts, but in so doing offers sacramentally the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.

—That it was Christ himself who instituted the sacrament of orders as the rite which confers the priesthood of the new covenant. This would complete the significant statement made in "Ministry and Ordination," No. 13, that in the eucharist the ordained minister "is seen to stand in sacramental relation to what Christ himself did in offering his own sacrifice." This clarification would seem all the more important in view of the fact that the ARCIC document does not refer to the character of priestly ordination which implies a configuration to the priesthood of Christ. The character of priestly ordination is central to the Catholic understanding of the distinction between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptized. It is moreover important for the recognition of holy orders as a sacrament instituted by Christ and not therefore a simple ecclesiastical institution.

The commission itself has, in "Ministry

**QUOTE FROM A PAST
TEXT OF CURRENT
INTEREST:**

"We cannot ... ignore the effects of our centuries of separation. Such separation has inevitably led to the growth of divergent patterns of authority accompanied by changes in perceptions and practices. The differences between us are not only theological. Anglicans and Roman Catholics have now inherited different cultural traditions. Such differences in communities which have become isolated from one another have sometimes led to distortions in the popular perceptions which members of one church have of the other. As a result, visible unity may be viewed as undesirable or even unattainable. However, a closer examination of the developments which have taken place in our different communities shows that these developments, when held in complementarity, can contribute to a fuller understanding of communion.

"In recent years each communion has learned from its own and each other's experiences as well as through contact with other churches. Since the Second Vatican Council, the principle of collegiality and the need to adapt to local cultural conditions have been more clearly recognized by the Roman Catholic Church than before. Developing liturgical diversity, the increasing exercise of provincial autonomy and the growing appreciation of the universal nature of the church have led Anglicans to develop organs of consultation and unity within their own communion. These developments remind us of the significance of mutual support and criticism as together we seek to understand ecclesial communion and to achieve it...."

"Grave obstacles from the past and of recent origin must not lead us into thinking that there is no further room for growth toward fuller communion. It is clear to the commission as we con-

clude this document that despite continuing obstacles our two communions agree in their understanding of the church as communion. Despite our distinct historical experiences, this firm basis should encourage us to proceed to examine our continuing differences."

(From "Church as Communion," a statement of the second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, released in 1991, in *Origins*, Vol. 20, quotes on p. 726.)

For another text in *Origins* by the second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, see "Salvation and the Church," Vol. 16, pp. 611ff. See also the observations on that statement by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in *Origins*, Vol. 18, pp. 429ff.

Among past texts of current interest in *Origins*, see:

—"A Meeting of the Pope and Canterbury's Archbishop," Vol. 19, pp. 316ff.

—"Letters Exchanged by Pope and Canterbury Archbishop," an exchange of correspondence regarding ordination of women, Vol. 20, pp. 63f.

An earlier exchange of letters between the pope and the archbishop of Canterbury on the issue of women's ordination appeared in *Origins*, Vol. 16, pp. 153ff.

and Ordination: Elucidation," No. 5, referred to the developments within the Anglican Communion after the setting up of ARCIC I, in connection with the ordination of women. The Final Report states that members of the commission believe "that the principles upon which its doctrinal agreement rests are not affected by such ordinations; for it was concerned with the origin and nature of the ordained ministry and not with the question of who can or who cannot be ordained." The view of the Catholic Church in this matter has been expressed in an exchange of correspondence with the archbishop of Canterbury, in which it is made clear that the question of the subject of ordination is linked with the nature of the sacrament of holy orders. Differences in this connection must therefore affect the agreement reached on ministry and ordination.

The question of apostolic succession is not dealt with directly in the Final Report of ARCIC I, but it is referred to in "Ministry and Ordination," No. 16, and in "Ministry and Ordination: Elucidation," No. 4. The essential features of "what is meant in our two traditions by ordination in the apostolic succession" are set

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set down in "Ministry and Ordination," No. 16, and the statement is made that "because they (the ordaining bishops) are entrusted with the oversight of other churches, this participation in his ordination signifies that this new bishop and his church are within the communion of churches. Moreover, because they are representatives of their churches in fidelity to the teaching and mission of the apostles and are members of the episcopal college, their participation also ensures the historical continuity of this church with the apostolic church and its bishop with the original apostolic ministry." These sacraments stand in need of further clarification from the Catholic perspective. The Catholic Church recognizes in the apostolic succession both an unbroken line of episcopal ordination from Christ through the apostles down through the centuries to the bishops of today and an uninterrupted continuity in Christian doctrine from Christ to those today who teach in union with the college of bishops and its head, the successor of Peter. As *Lumen Gentium*, No. 20, affirms, the unbroken lines of episcopal succession and apostolic teaching stand in causal relationship to each other: "Among those various ministries which, as tradition witnesses, were exercised in the church from the earliest times, the chief place belongs to the office of those who, appointed to the episcopate in a sequence running back to the beginning, are the ones who pass on the apostolic seed. Thus,

as St. Irenaeus testifies, through those who were appointed bishops and apostles, and through their successors down to our own time, the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved throughout the world." This question, then, lies at the very heart of the ecumenical discussion and touches vitally all the themes dealt with by ARCIC I: the reality of the eucharist, the sacramentality of the ministerial priesthood, the nature of the Roman primacy.

A final word seems necessary in relation to the attitude to the Final Report to the interpretation of Scripture insofar as the role of tradition is concerned. It is true that this subject was not treated specifically by the commission, yet there are statements made which cannot be allowed to pass without comment in this reply. As is well known, the Catholic doctrine affirms that the historical-critical method is not sufficient for the interpretation of Scripture. Such interpretation cannot be separated from the living tradition of the church which receives the message of Scripture. The Final Report seems to ignore this when dealing with the interpretation of the Petrine texts of the New Testament, for it states that they "do not offer sufficient basis" on which to establish the primacy of the bishop of Rome. In the same way, the Final Report introduces with reference to the infallible judgments of the bishop of Rome the need for such decisions to be "manifestly a legitimate interpretation of biblical faith and in line with orthodox tradition" (AII, 29). Certainly there is need, then, for further study concerning Scripture, tradition and the magisterium and their interrelationship since, according to Catholic teaching, Christ has given to his church full authority to continue, with the uninterrupted and efficacious assistance of the Holy Spirit, "to preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it and make it more widely known" (*Dei Verbum*, 9-10).

Conclusion: The above observations are not intended in any way to diminish appreciation for the important work done by ARCIC I, but rather to illustrate areas within the matters dealt with by the Final Report about which further clarification or study is required before it can be said that the statements made in the Final Report correspond fully to Catholic doctrine on the eucharist and on ordained ministry.

The quite remarkable progress that has been made in respect of authority in the church indicates just how essential this question is for the future of Roman Catholic-Anglican dialogue. The value of any consensus reached in regard to other matters will to a large extent depend on the authority of the body which eventually endorses them.

The objection may be made that this reply does not sufficiently follow the ecumenical method, by which agreement is sought step by step rather than in full agreement at the first attempt. It must, however, be remembered that the Roman Catholic Church was asked to give a clear answer to the question, Are the agreements contained in this report consonant with the faith

of the Catholic church? What was asked for was not a simple evaluation of an ecumenical study, but an official response as to the identity of the various statements with the faith of the Church.

It is sincerely hoped that this reply will contribute to the continued

dialogue between Anglicans and Catholics in the spirit of the common declaration made between Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie during the visit of the latter to Rome in 1989. There it is stated: "We here do solemnly recommit ourselves and those

we represent to the restoration of visible unity and full ecclesial communion in the confidence that to seek anything else would be to betray our Lord's intention for the unity of his people." ☒