

The Anglican Church of Canada

L'Eglise Episcopale du Canada

Ecumenical
Office

L'office
d'oecuménisme

600 Jarvis Street
Toronto
Ontario
M4Y 2J6

(416) 924-9192
Telex: #065-24128
Marturia, Toronto



March 27, 1979

Jan Cardinal Willebrands,
Secretariat for Promoting Christian
Unity,
00120 Vatican City State,
Europe.

11 APR. 1979

Your Eminence,

The Canadian Anglican Roman Catholic Dialogue which has been meeting now for over eight years, passed the following motion at a meeting held in Kingston Ontario, March 2 - 3, 1979:

The dialogue requests:

- a) that the work of ARCIC be extended to allow adequate time for intensive study of Paragraph 24 of the Venice Statement and related issues.
- b) that future work of ARCIC be directed towards actual unity by steps."

I was directed by the dialogue, as its secretary, to bring this motion to your attention.

Yours sincerely,

The Rev. J. B. Boyles
Ecumenical Officer

cc. Mon. Charles Moeller

2. Is the episcopate of the 'esse' of the Church?

Referring to the phrase just cited from VS(5), the commentary states that the words are important "if they imply recognition by the Anglican members of the Commission that the sacramental hierarchical structure of the Church is necessary to the 'esse' of the Church (its very nature) and not merely to its 'bene esse' (its well-being or fulness)-- and this ... by a mandate given by Christ." The terms 'esse' and 'bene esse', deliberately avoided by VS according to the principle mentioned in (25), represent, as the commentary notes, two theological responses, which Anglican comprehensiveness welcomes equally, to the question: does the episcopate belong to the "esse" or the "Bene esse" of the Church? The commentary states that the "bene esse" response seems to give the hierarchical structure "only a secondary importance not concerned with the faith itself: a position which does not correspond with that of the Catholic Church." The commentary is therefore concerned about a possible ambiguity in the way Anglicans might interpret the passage in question.

We find ambiguity in this commentary rather than in VS. If "the sacramental hierarchical structure of the Church" -- a phrase not found in VS -- refers to the ordained ministry, then there is no dispute within Anglicanism--nor between Anglicanism and the Roman Catholic Church-- that the ordained ministry is "intrinsic to the Church's structure according to the mandate given by Christ." This is clear both from VS (5) as well as the Canterbury Statement on Ministry (6), where we read: "ministerial office . . . is part of God's design for his people" (cf. also article XXVI of the Articles of Religion).

If, however, "the sacramental hierarchical structure" refers to the historic threefold distinction within the ordained ministry, of bishop, presbyter and deacon, then both the Canterbury Statement (6) and Vatican II (Lumen Gentium, n. 20) agree that this threefold ministry is "from antiquity", if not from the New Testament period itself. Commenting on the Lumen Gentium text, Karl Rahner notes that, according to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, "there is at least one full office in the Church, fully

realized in the episcopal office, which is of divine institution. But the two limited degrees of this office (priesthood, diaconate) . . . go back to a legitimate decision of the apostles and/or of the apostolic Church And here we may leave it an open question whether this decision also binds the Church which came after, that is, is part of the . . . divine law in the apostolic Church, or represents Church law of human institution in the apostolic age" (ed. H. Vorgrimler, Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, vol. I (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), pp. 191-192).

In light of the distinction drawn in the two preceding paragraphs and the correspondingly distinct affirmations, we see no grounds for supposing that there is less than full consensus on the affirmation of VS that the ordained ministry "is intrinsic to the Church's structure" and, as such, of the "esse" of the Church. The Canterbury Statement on Ministry fully establishes this consensus.

3. The balance between the 'primatial' and the 'conciliar' elements in the exercise of authority.

a) Responsibility or power?

5? The commentary notes that VS speaks more often of responsibility than of power (understood as a "right to be obeyed") in discussing the exercise of authority. Again, this is a very slight reservation because, citing VS (6), the commentary acknowledges that this idea of power is linked to the exercise of the authority held by ordained ministers.

b) Interaction between the primatial and conciliar elements

While recognizing that VS clearly underscores the presence of responsibility and power in the ordained minister within the local koinonia, the commentary thinks this does not appear so clearly when VS deals with the role of a primate in assuring koinonia between local churches. The commentary nonetheless attributes to VS the view that "the charism of episcopo which the bishop receives at his ordination is intended to safeguard koinonia not only within his own local church but between it and the other local churches." According to the commentary, it "would have been better" had VS repeated this

principle when speaking of the empowerment of the primate to carry out his primatial functions. Thus, the very wording of this reservation indicates it has to do with a matter of emphasis rather than substance. Moreover, VS (10) does in fact speak of "a function of oversight of the other bishops of their regions" being assigned to primatial bishops. And VS (11) spells out even more fully the role of a primate. Further specifications of the exercise of primatial authority are doubtless necessary, but they would pertain more to canon law than to an agreed statement of ecumenical theology.

c) Regional koinonia and universal koinonia

The commentary fears that the predominantly inductive method of VS makes it appear that "the emergence of universal primacy . . . (is) the result of a simple delegation of powers by local churches"— in contrast to the teaching of the First Vatican Council that the universal primacy is of divine right.

This seems to be the most serious reservation listed by the commentary. Yet it seems to be the least well-founded inasmuch as it overlooks the crucial affirmation made in VS (24b): "If it "the language of 'divine right' used by Vatican D is understood as affirming that the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome is part of God's design for the universal koinonia then it need not be a matter of disagreement" (emphasis added). One should recall the citation in section 2 of this Note from the Canterbury Statement (6) where the identical language — "part of God's design" — is used to express what traditional theology has called the jus divinum origin of the ordained ministry.

The commentary also finds it, "to say the least, awkward" when VS (24) says: "What we have written here amounts to a consensus on authority in the Church and, in particular, on the basic principles of primacy." This is awkward, says the commentary, because it "suggests that agreement is acknowledged on everything concerning authority in the Church." But VS precisely does not want to be understood as making that suggestion, for it adds almost immediately to the sentence cited above that the consensus "does not wholly resolve all the problems associated with papal primacy" even though "it provides us with a solid basis for confronting them."

4. Remaining difficulties and prospects of solution

Here the commentary simply summarizes without discussion the difficulties listed in VS (24). The commentary correctly notes that it was lack of time that led the International Commission to confine itself only to very brief indications of prospective solutions to the remaining difficulties. In a highly positive and optimistic spirit the commentary adds: "It would have been easy to show how and in what measure the considerations contained in the report and the method which inspired it already provide noteworthy elements for further progress in convergence."

This section of the commentary concludes on an unfortunate note, however, in that it repeats the mistaken view which we have already addressed critically in 3. The commentary states: "Catholic doctrine on this point (the universal primacy) cannot be securely founded merely on the fact of the historical emergence of a universal primacy, nor on the fact of its recognition by the community during the centuries before the great schisms, nor yet on the appeal to a 'scientific' exegesis of scripture", but on an intimate conviction of faith. But VS does not found the universal primacy of the See of Rome merely on those bases. It acknowledges in (12) the historical fact that the emergence of the Roman primacy "was interpreted as Christ's will for his Church" and in (24-b) it implicitly makes the affirmation of faith that "the universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome is part of God's design for the universal koinonia."

- - -

Having offered our response to the reservations of the commentary concerning the method and some of the assertions of VS which may "at first reading provoke some astonishment," it is our conviction that further study of VS will not only overcome those possible misgivings, but will enable the reader to share the sense of gratitude which ARC-Canada has experienced as a result of the ecumenical achievement recorded in the Venice Statement.