

A Note on Pope Paul's Letter to Cardinal Willebrands on the
700th Anniversary of the Council of Lyons (1274)

Members of ARCIC will be aware that on more than one occasion Fr. Pierre Duprey has spoken of the importance of the letter sent by Pope Paul VI to Cardinal Willebrands (as his Legate) on the celebration of the 700th anniversary of the Second Council of Lyons dated 5th October 1974. The letter has relevance to ARCIC discussion on Ecumenical Councils. Fr. Duprey has furnished me with a full copy of the text, part of the fourth paragraph of which I think you may find helpful to have:

"Hoc Lugdunense Concilium, quod sextum recensetur inter
Generales Synodos in Occidentali orbe celebratas, anno
MCCLXXIV a Decessore Nostro Beato Gregorio X Convocatum est."

I note with interest that Fr. Duprey's assessment of its significance is also shared (in an Orthodox/Roman Catholic context) by Fr. John Meyendorff in his contribution to A Pope for all Christians? (Paulist Press/SPCK):

"Even more significantly, the pope calls the Council of Lyons 'the sixth of the General Synods held in the Western world,' and not an 'ecumenical Council.' Can the same therefore be said of Trent, Vatican I and Vatican II? If so, a really important step seems to have been taken, modifying the previously held concept of papal authority.

In ARCIC's expansion of Venice 24 some reference may well have to be made to the footnote to 19 and distinctions which may be drawn between 'ecumenical' and 'general' councils. (Anglican criticism of Venice has certainly confused the two.) I hope this note may contribute material for the debate.

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