

Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations

A recent Anglican visitor to Rome has suggested that the following points might be brought to the attention of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission:--

1. The Ordination of Women

The Anglican Consultative Council at Limuru declared that, if an Anglican Bishop, acting with the consent of his Province, decides to ordain women to the priesthood, "his action will be acceptable to this Council." It also invited the Churches of the Anglican Communion to report their own views of the matter, and those of other Churches, in time for its next meeting.

Many Roman Catholics have been distressed by this declaration. They have also felt that their views should have been invited before, not after, it was made. They are critical both of the declaration and of its subject-matter. The equality of men and women, they argue, does not mean they should do the same things. Christ, who was not unwilling to go against the cultural or religious customs of his day, did not do so in this matter. In contrast to the resolution of the 1968 Lambeth Conference that there were no conclusive theological arguments against the ordination of women to the priesthood, some Roman Catholics wish to argue that there are. Priesthood in the Church expresses the Priesthood of Christ, who reveals the Paternity of God. But the Fatherhood of God cannot be communicated through the priesthood of women.

(Perhaps it could be added that if Roman Catholics should properly be asked to express their views on the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Church, Anglicans should also be invited to make their contribution, based on long experience, to the debate on clerical marriage and celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church.)

2. Local or Global Re-Union?

So far A.R.C.I.C. has had as its goal re-union on a world-wide scale. But will it take so long to reach universal agreement that serious consideration should be given to regional re-union? Certainly the Archbishop of Canterbury said at Easter 1971 that this was worth exploring. In favour of it, it can be argued that the speed of progress in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations varies so much in different parts of the world that those who are already close should not be asked

to wait (for ever?) until the rest catch up with them. It might be possible (in America and elsewhere) for Roman Catholics to declare their acceptance of Anglican orders and for intercommunion to be officially approved. Looking further ahead, such regions might be granted provincial autonomy of jurisdiction, while remaining in full communion with the rest of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches.

Such a project might commend itself to the Churches. It would, however, raise in an acute form the problem of the relation between the local and the universal Church. It is already clear that the recent rapid development of inter-Church relations and the Second Vatican Council's commendation of "collegiality" have led many to re-examine the theology of the Church and the way in which jurisdiction is exercised within the Roman Catholic Church. It is possible to stress above all the concept of the Church as 'universal' and the direct relationship of Bishops and their flocks to the Papacy. It is also possible to begin with the concept of the autonomous local Church as the full expression of the Body of Christ as it gathers for worship and disperses for mission. The relations between local Churches would then be safeguarded and expressed by the fraternal relationships established within the 'college of Bishops', and the ministry of Pope or Provincial Bishops might become primarily one of pastoral care for the episcopate.

If, however, it is still felt that re-union on a world-wide scale should remain our aim, should A.R.C.I.C. continue to work as at present? Or should four (or more) national Anglican/Roman Catholic Commissions separately draw up agreed findings on the Eucharist and Orders that were endorsed by their respective higher authorities, which together could form a basis for unity to be commended by Rome and the Anglican Communion to other regions for their approval?

June 1971