

COMMENTARY ON ARC/USA STATEMENT ON ANGLICAN ORDERS

R. William Franklin and George H. Tavard

One result of Vatican II and of the promulgation of its decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, was the opening of official relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. These relationships have existed since 1965 both at the international level and at various national levels. The first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission ended its work in 1981 with the publication of its *Final Report*. A second commission succeeded it and today continues its work. The foundation of the international dialogue is not a general Roman Catholic recognition of the ministry of the Anglican churches; rather, the foundation of the dialogue is located in the "special place" of the Anglican Communion that was recognized, but left undefined, in *Unitatis redintegratio*.

At the national level, the United States dialogue between the Episcopal Church and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (ARC/USA) has met as a rule three times every two years since 1965. From time to time, ARC/USA has issued joint statements dealing with matters of concern to the two churches. These have been published chiefly in the volume, *Called to Full*

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Unity (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1986), edited by Joseph W. Witmer and J. Robert Wright.

ARC/USA has focused attention on two matters relating to ordination. The first occasion was provided by the ordination of women in the Episcopal Church to the presbyterate in 1974. In October, 1975, ARC/USA adopted "A Statement on the Question of the Ordination of Women," which had been prepared by a special consultation of scholars. Though the statement and papers were made available in the booklet *Pro and Con on Ordination of Women: Report and Papers from the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation*, and though the work was quite scholarly in substance and well-balanced in its conclusions, this statement was largely ignored at the time by the churches. For this reason, ARC/USA discussed the question of the ordination of women again as it prepared the agreed statement "Christian Anthropology," issued in 1983. Once more it discussed ordination in December, 1986, with special attention to the ordination of women to the episcopate, though no agreed statement was published on this topic.

The second and present occasion to study questions relating to ordination was prompted by the embarrassment that is increasingly felt by many in relations between Roman Catholics and Anglicans in view of the condemnation of Anglican ordinations as "null and void" by Pope Leo XIII in 1896. A church that gives a major importance to doctrinal tradition should be able to explain theologically the grounds of its actions and the actions of its chief officers in withholding recognition from the ministers of other churches. There had been a rumor in the last years of the reign of Pope Paul VI that the question of the validity of Anglican orders might be reopened officially. However, it was the opening of the Vatican Archives in 1978 for the period of Leo XIII that incited a fresh interest in this question: We can now study in detail the work of the advisory commission on Anglican orders that had been set up by Leo XIII. ARC/USA decided to explore this question carefully over a number of years, and fresh examination of the data has shed new light on the subject.

This agreed report on "Anglican Orders" draws encouragement from the revelation, following the opening of the Vatican Archives, that four of the eight members of Leo XIII's "Apostolic Commission" (including the later Cardinal Secretary of State, Pietro Gasparri) had advised the pope in favor of recognizing Anglican orders in 1896, as well as from the discovery of letters in the Vatican in which Leo XIII and his Secretary of State, Cardinal Rampolla, wished to encourage further contacts and discussions with Anglicans after the promulgation of *Apostolicae curae*. In light of these new historical documents, the agreed report concludes that *Apostolicae curae* did not end a process of dialogue but began a process of dialogue.

Two other factors are treated in the report that also help to create a new context in which the Roman Catholic Church can look afresh at the question of Anglican orders: Vatican II's teaching on the sacramentality of the epis-

copate, and the reforms of the Catholic ordination rite by Pius XII and Paul VI. The Roman reform of the ritual of ordination narrows the gap between the Anglican ordinal and the Roman pontifical and helps to shape a different terrain for the evaluation of Anglican orders.

The "new context" treated here is not the full contemporary context, which would have to include the question of the ordination of women. Rather, the context is delimited by the findings of ARCIC-I on "substantial agreement" in the doctrine of orders expressed in the *Final Report*. In this report, "substantial" is defined as an agreement that is full enough to serve as a ground for solving remaining problems.

As in the past, the text of the ARC report was drafted by a small committee made up of the two authors of this commentary—Tavard representing the Roman Catholics; Franklin, the Episcopalians. From 1986, Tavard and Franklin had presented a series of papers to ARC/USA on the historical and theological issues surrounding Anglican orders and the opening of the Vatican Archives for 1896. The response of the full commission, as well as the reactions of two consultants to the drafting committee—the Revs. James O'Connor of St. Joseph Seminary and William Stafford of the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia—shaped a final report that was adopted unanimously by ARC/USA on May 8, 1990, meeting in Long Branch, New Jersey.

ARC/USA does not solve all the problems of Anglican orders with this report, but it does indicate a process forward: the clearing up of past debates, the way of serene study and mutual consultation, and the multiplication of good-will gestures. Several considerations will help to gauge the success of this approach to ecumenical dialogue:

1. While one may argue in favor of linking the present problem of the ordination of women and the matter of Anglican orders, ARC/USA chose deliberately to separate the two questions.

2. The reason for this separation was methodological. The best way to solve complex questions is to reduce them to simpler questions. Since the ordination of women played no role in the decision of Leo XIII, a historical and theological study of this decision should not consider the problem of the ordination of women.

3. ARC/USA also chose a gradual approach. That is, its statement is limited to describing the present context of the problem that had been stated negatively by Pope Leo. Rather than arriving at an evaluation of the substance of Leo's decision, the ARC report describes a context, nonexistent in 1896, that gives urgency to finding a new solution, one that will take account of the ecumenical situation of our times.

4. The agreed report of ARC/USA makes no concrete practical recommendation to the authorities of the churches. Past statements of ARC/USA did include such recommendations. Those, however, that required action outside of ARC/USA itself were largely disregarded. ARC/USA has now

grown wiser: may the Spirit lead and inspire appropriate initiatives; it is not the task of a joint commission to tell the churches what to do.

5. The present report is relevant to the task and to the agenda of the international dialogue of ARCIC-II. Again, however, how and when it should make use of the insights of ARC/USA should be decided by ARCIC-II alone, in light of its understanding of its task.

The full ARC/USA statement follows:

ANGLICAN ORDERS: A REPORT ON THE EVOLVING CONTEXT OF THEIR EVALUATION IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Introduction

The Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States has since 1986 addressed the question of the evaluation by the Holy See of Anglican orders. In 1985 Jan Cardinal Willebrands, using a phrase taken from the ARCIC *Final Report*, had recognized that "a new context" is now affecting the discussion of Anglican orders within the Roman Catholic Church because of the development of the thinking in the two Communion regarding the nature of the Eucharist and ordained ministry. It has been the purpose of ARC/USA to discuss and to outline the positive dimensions of this "new context."

We wish to underline at the outset the limits of this study. We have focused our attention on factors that seem most to encourage the reconciliation of our two Communion. Other observers may point to additional features of Anglican/Roman Catholic relationships in the last century, such as an interpretation of *Apostolicae curae* as an infallible pronouncement of the Holy See, the encyclical *Mortalium animos* of 1928, or the reluctance of some Anglicans to move toward belief in the Eucharistic celebration as a sacrifice.

And there are recent developments which have been omitted from consideration in this statement, such as the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate within the Anglican Communion. No realistic observer can exclude these events from "the new context." Yet we have acted on the suggestion of Cardinal Willebrands in his 1985 letter that it is the negative judgment of Pope Leo XIII in *Apostolicae curae* (1896) against the validity of Anglican ordinations that is still "the most fundamental" issue that hinders the mutual recognition of ministries between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. Here we stress only the manner in which the themes addressed in *Apostolicae curae* have been a point of departure for dialogue and debate between our two Communion for almost a century, and we record the progress made on these issues.