

THE CONCEPT OF UNITY IN ARCIC I

Some Personal Comments

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1. Bilateral dialogues between Christian World Communions pursue different goals ranging from seeking better mutual understanding to preparing the way for full visible unity. In some dialogues their goals have changed in the course of the development of the conversations (in some cases to a more "ambitious" goal and in a few others to a more "modest" one).

ARCIC I was oriented from the beginning towards a clear goal : "full visible unity" or "full, organic unity of our two Communions" (Malta, paras. 17 and 18) or "restoration of complete communion of faith and sacramental life" (Common Declaration, 1968). This concept of "organic unity" or "full visible communion" has been reaffirmed throughout the work of ARCIC I and in its Final Report (Introduction 8 and Conclusion).

2. In the World Council of Churches (multilateral dialogue) attempts have been made since New Delhi 1961 to clarify basic conditions and structures of expression of "the unity we seek". As a result of this process Nairobi 1975 formulated the goal of a "conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united". This concept presupposes organic unions in "each place" and finds its expression in confession of the one (apostolic) faith, mutual recognition of sacraments and ministries, sacramental communion, common witness and service and conciliar structures of consultation and decision.

The development of bilateral dialogues also led to considerations about the concepts of unity. In connection with some of them the concept of "unity in reconciled diversity" emerged. This

concept, which was also proposed under other terms (e.g., concept of "sister churches"), shared with "conciliar fellowship" the basic requirements of unity, but laid greater stress on the value of confessional traditions which should, in a modified and "reconciled" form, be preserved and not disappear in mergers/unions of churches.

ARCIC I shared the basic requirements of both concepts (common faith, mutual recognition of sacraments and ministry). In addition it took over the idea of a conciliar fellowship but extended it by the complementary aspect of primacy as a service to the universal koinonia. But there are also affinities to "reconciled diversity" by stressing legitimate diversity (e.g., Authority Preface; Conclusion of Final Report) which in this case would be a diversity constituted by characteristic elements of the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions.

3. Together with other reflections on "the unity we seek" ARCIC I has been clear about the fact that doctrinal conversations and agreements are only one important element in the search for and expression of visible unity (c.f., already the Malta Report). A special contribution of ARCIC I has been (again starting already with the Malta Report) the perspective of unity by stages and of the concept of "substantial agreement".

4. I believe that further clarification on the basis of ARCIC I is necessary:

(a) What are possible structures of "full organic unity" between Anglicans and Roman Catholics? Could it be a "communion of Communions" in which both Communions preserve their basic identities including some measure of structural autonomy but being bound together by full sacramental communion and common and complementary forms of conciliar and primatial authority?

(b) What stages towards full visible unity could be envisaged? There are indications already in the Malta Report, and ARCIC I was obviously thinking in terms of some form of eucharistic hospitality. But are there other stages? Is it possible to envisage full sacramental communion before a "common acceptance of a universal primacy" (Introduction 8) is possible? And could there be stages in such an acceptance where e.g., Anglicans could, as a first step, agree to a differentiated acceptance of primacy compared with Roman Catholics?

5. Such or other clarifications are, I believe, necessary, because they would have an impact on the reception process of ARCIC I (people will ask "Where does this journey lead us?") and they would help to give orientation to the methodology and content of the work of ARCIC II.

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