

6th September, 1987

Group B

Unity and Diversity

1. God, mirroring the rich mystery of God's triune life, created the universe a unity in diversity, as the very word, "universe", indicates. In creating a single human nature, God established women and men in communion with God, with each other, and with the whole of the rest of creation. Together his creatures were to share the richness of their many gifts.

2. The Church is the "sign, steward and instrument" of God in the fulfilment of this purpose (cf. Salvation and the Church, para. 29). When, as the ekklesia of God, we are "called out", we are not separated from the world, but called out of our egocentrism and out of a world which is centred in ourselves. Life in the Church is one with life in the world willed by God - a world centred in Christ and in others with Christ. Understanding life in the Church as a life in the world explains why there will always be richness and diversity in the Church.

3. Our alienation from God has turned the richness and differentiation of God's creation into estrangement, division, and conflict. But the love of God expressed in the first creation is revealed to the world more fully in the new creation in Christ. Through the gift of communion in the Spirit of Christ the Church bears witness to this love.

4. God's gift to the world in Christ heals the divisions which have been wrought by sin. The Spirit of God

which established the unity in diversity of the first creation, bestows new life and brings about reconciliation in the new creation. Thus the Church demonstrates to the world that the apparently insuperable divisions of the human family can be overcome through that koinonia which is a sharing in the goodness and love of God (cf. Salvation and the Church, para. 30).

DIVERSITY WITHIN THE COMMUNION OF CHURCHES.

5. Because the Church is that part of humanity which gratefully accepts God's gift of reconciliation in Christ, the God-given diversity within humanity must also be present and promoted within each Christian community and between them. In and through this diversity God, through the Holy Spirit, manifests the transforming power of divine love for humanity.
6. In the Church each member is called to contribute his or her diverse personal gifts to the life and service of the community. All members also receive as integral to their salvation diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are received for the sake of the whole Body of Christ which is to be built up and renewed. And in a similar way the different Christian communities are called to share their diverse resources - personal, material, spiritual - with each other, as already the New testament testifies.
7. Amongst the gifts of the Spirit are the different ministries which have the special responsibility to promote, coordinate and guard in unity all the charisms of the community. These ministries, and especially the episcopate, are also called to the promotion, coordination and guarding of the diverse heritages and traditions of different churches in communion (cf Acts 15).
8. Because since the beginning the living tradition of the Gospel is incarnated in local situations and cultures and because the mission of the Church is for all the ages the Church cannot exist without diversity. Such diversity is realized on all levels of the Church's reality without, however, fragmenting its essential unity given by God in Christ. Accordingly, this diversity is expressed in the richness of liturgies and forms of spirituality, diverse disciplines and structures of authority, variety of theologies and even different doctrinal expressions of the same truth.

9. Because of the communion given and sustained by the Holy Spirit, all these diverse forms of responding to and living by the grace of God are not merely juxtaposed. Rather they enrich each other and together they witness to humanity that, thanks to the salvation given in Christ Jesus, diversity within humanity will not necessarily lead to division, but may reflect the richness of creation and God's purpose for humanity.

10. The Church has always confessed its catholicity. This does not only mean that following the great commission of Jesus Christ the Gospel has to be proclaimed to all nations until the end of times. It also means that the Church of God is called to be that part of humanity in which all the diversity and richness both of God's created order and of God's providential care for his world are received and embraced in the truth of the one Gospel.

11. This catholicity maintains its unity and coherence in the one common confession of the apostolic faith which remains the same in all the diversity of contexts, traditions, cultures and forms of life. Thus, being Catholic, the Church is called by God to be in every place and in every time the communion in Jesus Christ of all people in their various endowments, their needs, their solidarity, their aspirations and their longing for fullness of life.

LIMITS TO DIVERSITY

Communion is unity in diversity. Diversity is as vital a dimension of communion as is unity. However forms of diversity which enhance and strengthen communion are to be clearly distinguished from those which militate against it. These latter need to be identified in any theological reflection on communion.

Communion is threatened by affirmations or actions which undermine the reality of the Church as God's gathered people and as the Body of Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Communion is threatened by the denial of the authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God, of the apostolic faith, as understood and confessed by the Church in the formation of the ecumenical creeds or of the continuity of God's continuing authentic self-disclosure and guidance through the Church and in the world.

Communion is threatened when Christians engage in activities which hamper the Church's mission of evangelisation and of work for justice and peace.

Communion is threatened when individuals or groups, instead of seeking to make their prophetic challenges and new insights fruitful for the renewal of the community, insist on their views and judgments in such a way as to attack and weaken the Christian community's shared commitment to Christ.

Communion being made up of persons, is threatened by cooperative associations or individual actions which promote ends destructive of personhood. Making human beings as objects, as for example with sexual exploitation and racial discrimination, are clear attacks on the right of full personhood which is given to women and men in creation.

Communion is threatened when Christians driven by greed or inordinate pride in human capability realise achievements which attack human nature or destroy the order of creation.

Communion is realised through the eucharist in which we participate in Christ in a unique way. It is therefore threatened when the centrality of the eucharist is resisted or denied.