

The Malta Report

Report of the Anglican - Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission

I.

1. The visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Pope Paul VI in March 1966, and their decision to constitute an Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, marked a new stage in relations between our two Churches. The three meetings of the Commission, held during 1967 at Gazzada, Huntercombe, and in Malta, were characterized not only by a spirit of charity and frankness, but also by a growing sense of urgency, penitence, thankfulness, and purpose: of urgency, in response to the pressure of God's will, apprehended as well in the processes of history and the aspirations and achievements of men in his world as in the life, worship, witness, and service of his Church; of penitence, in the conviction of our shared responsibility for cherishing animosities and prejudices which for four hundred years have kept us apart, and prevented our attempting to understand or resolve our differences; of thankfulness for the measure of unity which through baptism into Christ we already share, and for our recent growth towards greater unity and mutual understanding; of purpose, in our determination that the work begun in us by God shall be brought by his grace to fulfilment in the restoration of his peace to his Church and his world.

2. The members of the Commission have completed the preparatory work committed to them by compiling this report which they submit for their consideration to His Holiness the Pope and His Grace the Archbishop. The Decree on Ecumenism recognizes that among the Western Communion separated from the Roman See the Churches of the Anglican Communion 'hold a special place'. We hope in humility that our work may so help to further reconciliation between Anglicans and Roman Catholics as also to promote the wider unity of all Christians in their common Lord. We share the hope and prayer expressed in the common declaration issued by the Pope and the Archbishop after their meeting that 'a serious dialogue founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions may lead to that unity in truth for which Christ prayed'.

3. We record with great thankfulness our common faith in God our Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit; our common baptism in the one Church of God; our sharing of the holy Scriptures, of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the Chalcedonian definition, and the teaching of the Fathers; our common Christian inheritance for many centuries with its living traditions of liturgy, theology, spirituality, Church order, and mission.

4. Divergences since the sixteenth century have arisen not so much from the substance of this inheritance as from our separate ways of receiving it. They derive from our experience of its value and power, from our interpretation of its meaning and authority, from our formulation of

its content, from our theological elaboration of what it implies, and from our understanding of the manner in which the Church should keep and teach the Faith. Further study is needed to distinguish between those differences which are merely apparent, and those which are real and require serious examination.

5. We agree that revealed Truth is given in holy Scripture and formulated in dogmatic definitions through thought-forms and language which are historically conditioned. We are encouraged by the growing agreement of theologians in our two Communion on methods of interpreting this historical transmission of revelation. We should examine further and together both the way in which we assent to and apprehend dogmatic truths and the legitimate means of understanding and interpreting them theologically. Although we agree that doctrinal comprehensiveness must have its limits, we believe that diversity has an intrinsic value when used creatively rather than destructively.

6. In considering these questions within the context of the present situation of our two Communion, we propose particularly as matter for dialogue the following possible convergences of lines of thought: first, between the traditional Anglican distinction of internal and external communion and the distinction drawn by the Vatican Council between full and partial communion; secondly, between the Anglican distinction of fundamentals from non-fundamentals and the distinction implied by the Vatican Council's references to a 'hierarchy of truths' (Decree on Ecumenism, 11), to the difference between 'revealed truths' and 'the manner in which they are formulated' (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 62), and to diversities in theological tradition being often 'complementary rather than conflicting' (Decree on Ecumenism, 17).

II.

7. We recommend that the second stage in our growing together begin with an official and explicit affirmation of mutual recognition from the highest authorities of each Communion. It would acknowledge that both Communion are at one in the faith that the Church is founded upon the revelation of God the Father, made known to us in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, who is present through the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and his Church, and is the only Mediator between God and Man, the ultimate Authority for all our doctrine. Each accepts the basic truths set forth in the ecumenical Creeds and the common tradition of the ancient Church, although neither Communion is tied to a positive acceptance of all the beliefs and devotional practices of the other.

8. In every region where each Communion has a hierarchy, we propose an annual joint meeting of either the whole or some considerable representation of the two hierarchies.

9. In the same circumstances we further recommend:

a. Constant consultation between committees concerned with pastoral and evangelistic problems including, where appropriate, the appointment of joint committees.

b. Agreements for joint use of churches and other ecclesiastical buildings, both existing and to be built, wherever such use is helpful for one or other of the two Communion.

c. Agreements to share facilities for theological education, with the hope that all future priests of each Communion should have attended some course taught by a professor of the other Communion. Arrangement should also be made where possible for temporary exchange of students.

d. Collaboration in projects and institutions of theological scholarship to be warmly encouraged.

10. Prayer in common has been recommended by the Decree on Ecumenism and provisions for this common worship are to be found in the *Directory* (para. 56).^{*} We urge that they be implemented.

11. Our similar liturgical and spiritual traditions make extensive sharing possible and desirable; for example, in non-eucharistic services, the exploration of new forms of worship, and retreats in common. Religious orders of similar inspiration in the two Communion are urged to develop a special relationship.

12. Our closeness in the field of sacramental belief leads us further to recommend that on occasion the exchange of preachers for the homily during the celebration of the Eucharist be also permitted, without prejudice to the more general regulations contained in the *Directory*.

13. Since our liturgies are closely related by reason of their common source, the ferment of liturgical renewal and reform now engaging both our Communion provides an unprecedented opportunity for collaboration. We should co-operate, and not take unilateral action, in any significant changes in the seasons and major holy days of the Christian Year; and we should experiment together in the development of a common eucharistic lectionary. A matter of special urgency in view of the advanced stage of liturgical revision in both Communion is that we reach agreement on the vernacular forms of those prayers, hymns, and responses which our people share in common in their respective liturgies. We recommend that this be taken up without delay.

We are gratified that collaboration in this work has been initiated by the exchange of observers and consultants in many of our respective liturgical commissions. Especially in matters concerning the vernacular, we recommend that representatives of our two Communion (not excluding other Christian bodies with similar liturgical concerns) be associated on a basis of equality both in international and in national and regional committees assigned this responsibility.

14. We believe that joint or parallel statements from our Church leaders at international, national, and local level on urgent human issues can provide a valuable form of Christian witness.

15. In the field of missionary strategy and activity ecumenical understanding is both uniquely valuable and particularly difficult. Very little has hitherto been attempted in this field between our two Communion, and while our other recommendations of course apply to the young Churches and mission areas, we propose further the institution at international level of an official joint consultation to consider the difficulties involved and the co-operation which should be undertaken.

16. The increasing number of mixed marriages points to the need for a thorough investigation of the doctrine of marriage in its sacramental dimension, its ethical demands, its canonical status, and its pastoral implications. It is hoped that the work of the Joint Commission on Marriage will be promptly initiated and vigorously pursued, and that its recommendations will help to alleviate some of the difficulties caused by mixed marriages, to indicate acceptable changes in Church regulations, and to provide safeguards against the dangers which threaten to undermine family life in our time.

III.

17. We cannot envisage in detail what may be the issues and demands of the final stage in our quest for the full, organic unity of our two Communion. We know only that we must be constant in prayer for the grace of the Holy Spirit in order that we may be open to his guidance and judgement, and receptive to each other's faith and understanding. There remain fundamental theological and moral questions between us where we need immediately to seek together for reconciling answers. In this search we cannot escape the witness of our history; but we cannot resolve our differences by mere reconsideration of, and judgement upon, the past. We must press on in confident faith that new light will be given us to lead us to our goal.

18. The fulfilment of our aim is far from imminent. In these circumstances the question of accepting some measure of sacramental intercommunion apart from full visible unity is being raised on every side. In the minds of many Christians no issue is today more urgent. We cannot ignore this, but equally we cannot sanction changes touching the very heart of Church life, eucharistic communion, without being certain that such changes would be truly Christian. Such certainty cannot be reached without more and careful study of the theology implied.

19. We are agreed that among the conditions required for intercommunion are both a true sharing in faith and the mutual recognition of ministry. The latter presents a particular difficulty in regard to Anglican Orders according to the traditional judgement of the Roman Church. We

believe that the present growing together of our two Communion and the needs of the future require of us a very serious consideration of this question in the light of modern theology. The theology of the ministry forms part of the theology of the Church and must be considered as such. It is only when sufficient agreement has been reached as to the nature of the priesthood and the meaning to be attached in this context to the word 'validity' that we could proceed, working always jointly, to the application of this doctrine to the Anglican ministry today. We would wish to re-examine historical events and past documents only to the extent that they can throw light upon the facts of the present situation.

20. In addition, a serious theological examination should be jointly undertaken on the nature of authority with particular reference to its bearing on the interpretation of the historic faith to which both our Communion are committed. Real or apparent differences between us come to the surface in such matters as the unity and indefectibility of the Church and its teaching authority, the Petrine primacy, infallibility, and Mariological definitions.

21. In continuation of the work done by our Commission, we recommend that it be replaced by a Permanent Joint Commission responsible (in co-operation with the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations in association with the Anglican Executive Officer) for the oversight of Roman Catholic - Anglican relations, and the co-ordination of future work undertaken together by our two Communion.

22. We also recommend the constitution of two joint sub-commissions, responsible to the Permanent Commission, to undertake two urgent and important tasks:

ONE to examine the question of intercommunion, and the related matters of Church and Ministry;

THE OTHER to examine the question of authority, its nature, exercise, and implications.

We consider it important that adequate money, secretarial assistance, and research facilities should be given to the Commission and its sub-commissions in order that their members may do their work with thoroughness and efficiency.

23. We also recommend joint study of moral theology to determine similarities and differences in our teaching and practice in this field.

24. In concluding our Report we cannot do better than quote the words of those by whom we were commissioned, and to whom, with respect, we now submit it:

In willing obedience to the command of Christ who bade His disciples love one another, they declare that, with His help, they wish to leave in the hands of the God of mercy all that in the past has been opposed to this precept of charity, and that they make their

own the mind of the Apostle which he expressed in these words: 'Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus' (Phil 3:13-14).

-The Common Declaration by Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, 24 March 1966.

Malta, 2 January 1968

[*The Final Report* (London: CTS/SPCK, 1982), pp. 108-116]

ENDNOTES

* Editor's note: The version which is referred to here is the 1967 Directory Concerning Ecumenical Matters; Part One (*Ad Totam Ecclesiam*, 14 May, 1967) in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello Publishing Co, 1992), 483-501.