

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC JOINT PREPARATORY COMMISSION

UNITY: AN APPROACH BY STAGES?

by

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1. The Commission offers the following considerations in the light of the situation developing in Christianity as a whole, partly as a result of general world history and partly in consequence of the Ecumenical Movement in its present evolution. This situation can be summed up as follows: (a) the evolution of general world history makes Christian unity not only imperative but urgent. "Without vision the people perishes"; and we believe that only Christianity can offer that vision, and that it is gravely impeded in its task by its present internal divisions. (b) Nearly all the major Christian communions and traditions are now engaged in a converging movement. (c) Not only ecclesiastical statesmen and/or theologians are involved in this movement but the masses of the faithful are feeling the desire for unity more and more keenly - and are sometimes impatient with the slowness of their leaders and thinkers. Together, these factors seem to create an unprecedented situation, calling - it may be thought - for unprecedented measures.
2. But any such measures require, if not theological precedent, at least theological justification. This paper is concerned with possible measures in particular as regards the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions, and the question of theological justification for such measures.
3. Such theological justification must commend itself alike to both our communions. And here we note certain already existing theological agreements between us. The Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury have already agreed that the basis of the Catholic-Anglican dialogue shall be "Scripture and the Common Tradition". In fact, we agree that the ultimate authority for all doctrine and theology is the Word Incarnate and the revelation entrusted to the Church of the apostolic age. And we agree that the revelation in Christ finds a normative record in the Bible (discussion would be needed with regard to the authority to be accorded to the deuterocanonical books or "Apocrypha").

Scripture requires interpretation, and the Christian interpretation of the total biblical message takes shape in Tradition. Our two communions share a common past in Western mediaeval Christianity and in the "undivided Church" of the early centuries; hence the relevance of

the appeal to our "Common Tradition". This notion may need to be spelt out more fully. For instance, both our communions accept as authoritative the dogmatic formulations of the first four Ecumenical Councils (what about the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Councils?). And both communions respect the teaching of the ancient Fathers (up to 1054) to the extent to which, in a developing tradition, this teaching approaches unanimity. More particularly, we are united in our acceptance of the three ancient Creeeds as authoritative.

We refer here to the celebrated Lambeth Quadrilateral, which commends itself to us as "valid" at least as far as it goes. It is possible that its terminology could be revised with advantage. We note the close convergence of the Anglican statement on the apostolic ministry (in reference to negotiations with the English Methodist Church) and Vatican II's teaching on the apostolic-episcopal college contained in Lumen Gentium.

Very difficult obstacles to organic unity between us remain, particularly in the field of doctrine (the papal primacy, infallibility, "modern" Marian dogmas, for instance). On the other hand, it is common ground that "the obedience of faith" by which man "entrusts his whole self freely to God" is a personal assent to the revelation of God Himself in Christ; and that the reality of this assent may co-exist with a defective apprehension of the material constituents of this revelation. And it could be argued that the doctrinal differences between our two communions relate less to "the foundation of the Christian faith" than to elements in the deposit of faith which, while important, are less important than those elements on which we agree (cf. De Revelatione n.5, De Ecumenismo n.11).

4. It is agreed between us that Christ's own will and desire for the unity of his disciples is a sufficient reason for seeking unity. It is also agreed that separated Christian bodies have severally preserved and fostered distinctive values which need to be preserved. And each of us would agree that authentically Christian doctrines and practices may have been better remembered and practised amongst others than amongst themselves.
5. Reference has already been made to doctrinal divergences. At the heart of these are: (a) a differing theological evaluation of the divided state of Christianity. Anglicans would say that full visible unity is of the bene esse of the Church but not of its esse. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that it is of the esse of the Church and has therefore been preserved, in the visible communion of her own body, despite the tragic divisions of Christendom. (b) While both communions share a deep respect for the Common Tradition, the Roman Catholic Church holds that to the extent that this Tradition has been formulated in dogmatic definitions, or is expounded with moral unanimity by the episcopal college, it calls for not only respect but assent. We recognise the need of more reflection and discussion at this deep level of divergence between us.

6. It appears to us that a relatively large area of common action and common prayer is already theologically justifiable by the measure of doctrinal agreement which we gladly acknowledge. We accept the theological notion of "imperfect communion" set out in De Ecumenismo, and common action and prayer would appear to be desirable expressions of the amount of such "communion" already existing between us. We would further emphasise that doctrinal agreement and practical joint action and prayer are likely to develop hand in hand and to exert a mutually beneficial influence; this means that experiments in co-operation can be envisaged, with a full recognition that not all of them will prove to have been useful.
7. De Ecumenismo and the "Ecumenical Directory" have given a lead in practical matters to the Roman Catholic communion, and we think that few if any of the suggestions there made are unacceptable to the Anglican Communion. (We have ourselves, in previous statements, laid stress on some of these suggestions).
8. Such suggestions, taken together, would represent a "first stage" in our common Approach to Unity. So far as we can see, while further suggestions might be forthcoming at this stage, there is no further practical stage that can emerge short of "intercommunion", i.e. mutual authorisation of what Roman Catholic theology calls "communicatio in sacris", or participation in each other's liturgical prayer and sacraments.
9. Intercommunion presents profound difficulties which require mature consideration. It is well known that these difficulties have dogged the path of the ecumenical movement. Particularly where mutual esteem has grown up on the basis of a common dedication to the cause of unity, separation from each other at the Lord's table has seemed almost intolerable. On the other hand, and apart from theological problems of a speculative kind, it must be acknowledged that intercommunion can itself be a hindrance to the cause of unity by appearing to remove the tension which gives it some of its dynamism. And in fact, some English Free Churchmen would agree that intercommunion between the membership of their Churches has not led to a desire, effective in practice, to overcome the remaining barriers to full communion.
10. At the theological level, we agree with De Ecumenismo that "communicatio in sacris may not be regarded as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians. Such worship depends chiefly on two principles. It should signify the unity of the Church, it should provide a sharing in the means of grace. The fact that it should signify unity generally rules out communicatio in sacris. Yet the gaining of a needed grace sometimes commends it"(n.8). It appears to us that, if other obstacles were overcome, it would rest with our respective Church authorities to determine in what conditions, if at all, intercommunion should be established. Meanwhile, it may be apposite to point out that there was considerable intercommunion

between East and West after 1054; that Vatican II envisaged a certain revival of this between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic communions today; and that Western Canon Law has long permitted the reception of sacraments from a validly ordained minister outside the communion of the Holy See in extremis.

11. There is a particular obstacle between the Anglican and Roman Catholic communions with respect to possible intercommunion. The former does not acknowledge the validity - though it does not contest the efficacy - of Anglican ordained ministry. This means that the Anglican Eucharist is not recognised as fully "valid" by the Roman Catholic Church. We think that, for better mutual understanding, the notion of validity deserves fresh examination and elucidation. But for the overcoming of the obstacle, more than this would doubtless be necessary. At the theological level, it appears possible that a common deepening of our sacramental theology might be useful. At the more practical level, bearing in mind the analogous difficulties that have emerged in the quest of unity between the Anglican and other "reformed" communions and the desire for some regularisation of Protestant ministries to satisfy the Anglican difficulties in this matter, we venture to recall the affirmation of the Lambeth Conference of 1920 that the bishops there assembled would be prepared, in the interests of the achievement of full communion, to consider such "regularisation" of the Anglican ministry as might be required by the party with which unity was to be attained. While it is obvious that the Lambeth bishops of 1920 could not bind their successors, and that intercommunion is a much lesser goal than full communion, it appears to us that this declaration might well be borne in mind by both our communions if, on other grounds, intercommunion as a stage towards full communion should at some future date come to appear desirable.
12. We commend to our respective Principals the possibility of joint statements by the major Christian leaders (e.g. the Pope, the Patriarch and the Archbishop) on world issues such as those covered by the recent papal encyclical Populorum progressio. A dominant reason for the quest of Christian unity is that our divisions make our witness to the world less effective. Such common pronouncements, which do not require full communion or even intercommunion as a pre-condition, would go some way to unify our witness.
13. We wish to emphasise that, in our view, there is no automatic implication in Stage I of subsequently accepting Stage II; still less, that Stage II will inevitably lead on to Stage III, i.e. full communion. Unity, to the extent to which it comes about, will be the work of the Holy Spirit, and we cannot dictate dates or goals to Him. We have thought it to be our more modest task, to outline a possible road towards further unity, and to examine or to indicate the theological issues involved.