

The Response of the Roman Catholic Observer

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I wish first of all to thank His Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury, for inviting me to respond to his address. His own speech, together with the four responses, should furnish us all with a helpful conspectus of current reflection on ecumenism. This, in itself, seems to me both desirable and timely.

Most of all, however, I wish to thank the Archbishop for his own address, for its breadth of vision and for the lucid and careful way in which he has identified the questions that this assembly must face. Frequently while he was speaking I felt myself being drawn and challenged by the questions he raised. For these are not only your questions: they cannot only be your questions; in one guise or another they may well be our questions too. In fact, they are questions that impinge on everyone who is engaged in pastoral ministry. Above all, they are questions which touch everyone who is deeply and earnestly engaged in the service of unity, those, in other words, to whom it has been granted to grasp something of the depth of that prayer of Our Lord which was also a mandate to his disciples: 'may they all be one'.

'May they all be one': Concern for unity was powerfully evident in every word of what the Archbishop has said to us. I find it most telling that his opening address is precisely on the theme of unity. The Conference has before it a wide and varied range of pastoral, social, and theological issues waiting to be dealt with. There are therefore other themes, other avenues that might have claimed the attention of the Archbishop at this early stage. Yet he spoke about unity. In doing so, however, he has made it clear and it is a point I strongly corroborate – that the theme of unity bears directly on all the other topics, and all other topics have a bearing on the theme of unity. I want to reflect with you on why this is so.

In about 50 AD, Paul pointed out to the Corinthians how shabby their internal divisions really were. He showed them how narrow and how limited was their vision in the face of the reality that has broken into the world in and through the Risen Christ. 'Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:17–18).

Paul pleads with the Corinthians to be reconciled with one another. He pleads with us, too. He charges us to reconcile humanity in the name of Christ.

This message of reconciliation is perhaps more pressing in the world of today than it was nineteen centuries ago. The ministry of the Church is and must be seen to be a ministry of reconciliation. But for that to be so, must not we be reconciled, and must not we be seen to be reconciled? Reconciled with God and with one another: 'that they all may be one, so that the world may believe'.

'Behold, the new has come'; a new reality which is the final reality. The Archbishop, in putting the vision of the apocalypse before our eyes at the very beginning of his address, has confronted us with the vision which rules us on our journey and in all our striving. It is a vision, moreover, which must begin to be a reality on the journey itself. This final reality has already been bestowed on us for the transformation of the world. Even now, in and through the realities of this world, the 'powers of the world to come', (*dynameis tou mellontos aionos*, cf Heb 6:5) already engage us and transform us. In this truth lies the whole of the mystery of sacramentality: the mystery of the Church. The Church and its activities have to be signs and means by which the ultimate realities are made present to us, and we in turn are enabled to share in them. 'Behold, the new has come': the new creation is here and it is God working among us.

Above all, that work of God creates a quite new kind of unity: the unity of the members of the risen Christ. A new relationship is forged at the most profound level between those who are born again through baptism and who share in the same Spirit: the communion of the Holy Spirit. And by its very nature this is a relationship which is universal. All those who are baptised through water and the Holy Spirit are caught up in this single new reality which is the work of God. This relationship comes into being

and develops in and through the realities of this world: in time and in space. It cannot be otherwise if it is to be proclaimed and to be believed. It is a *new* reality. But how difficult it has been for Christians throughout the centuries to foster and maintain this newness in appropriate forms of community. There was a temptation to fall into the trap of thinking of it or describing it in terms of a monarchy or a parliamentary democracy. It cannot be these or any such thing. No: 'Behold, the new has come', a new reality involving a relationship of total dependence on our One Lord, through the Holy Spirit. That dependence is the crucial relationship in this new work of God. Everything that is in the Church is there simply to serve to announce and to show forth the one Lord who is its saviour and the source of its life. The manifestation of this relationship makes the Church a sign to the nations of the world, that is, the original and ultimate *glasnost*.

Is there not a danger of obscuring this newness with our talk of 'independence' for a Church which cannot have and would not want to have any other relationship than one of total dependence: 'everything comes from God'. He is the source of all, and all the Church's possibilities for being the agent of reconciliation and of peace can only come from him (cf 2 Cor 3:5); there is no account of the Church that can be given, no portrayal to be made of it except of its relationship to God, just as we can only understand the Son, the Head of the Church, in terms of his relation to the Father.

But precisely here, in the light of this radical dependence, there arises another aspect of the mystery of sacramentality, namely the living presence of Christ and the exercise of the authority of Christ within the Church. Moreover, the deep bond of communion between members of the Church is a profound and objective reality which demands real solidarity and interdependence among the local Churches.

Today, the mind of Christians – I won't say of the faithful, since it is precisely fidelity that is at issue here –, the mind of Christians, whatever their role in the Church, risks increasingly being formed by television, radio and the press, rather than by our receiving and our pondering the Word of God which is heard and celebrated in the Church. What is the danger here? The danger is that the newness given in Christ, the newness that is operative in and through the Church may be discerned only with difficulty, and perhaps with greater difficulty than was the case in the past. The risk we run is that the organisation of the community, of the society of the Church, its various services and ministries, the authority exercised within it and for it will be coloured and influenced by the currents and the thoughts of the present world (*tou aionos toutou*). Our vision and understanding risks being shaped by the spirit of this world, a spirit which often runs counter to the Spirit of God.

This is nothing new. We can find this happening in every era and in every division that wounds and isolates. But is it not more dangerous

today? Having learned from long experience, must we not be especially attentive today? In the face of new questions which may divide if they are posed, or may divide if they are avoided, must we not urgently ask whether their newness belongs to this world (*to aioni touto*) or to the world to come (*to mellonti aioni*) which is the source of reconciliation, of unity, and of communion. This is a discernment that has to be made by the Church as such.

'Behold, the new has come'. And so, what is involved in the constant reform which the Church as a human institution always needs is an ever-deeper fidelity to the new reality. Our renewal must be a striving to take hold of and to hold together all that has been given, all the aspects of God's plan, all the requirements of his Word.

I wish now to propose that, for Christians, it can never be either/or, it must always be both/and. The new reality is, inseparably, Way, Truth, and Life. This is what is transmitted in the Church. We see this very clearly, for example, in the question of apostolic succession. Apostolic succession is succession in ordination because it is also succession in faith. It is succession in faith because it is also succession in ordination. Likewise, the ideal of the community having but one heart and one mind (*homothymadon*), united in faith, coherent in its evangelical commitment at the service of all, is not ensured simply either through conciliarity or primacy. Christian primacy only exists within collegiality, and there is no true conciliarity unless each bishop recognises the one who is first among them and unless one does nothing of importance without him (cf 34 of Canon of the apostles). The whole of Church history teaches us this lesson. All efforts and authentic reform will seek to integrate these two aspects in their vital interaction. May I say how moved I was by what the Archbishop said on this matter.

Is the unity we seek an organic unity? Can it be otherwise? It is the unity of the members of the same body, a unity lived and expressed. It is the unity we have received and continue to receive from the head of the Body. Sometimes I have the impression – and I had it most strongly of all at the World Council of Churches assembly in 1975 in Nairobi – that people oppose organic unity because they see 'organic' as meaning 'organisation'. Others fear that in describing the unity we seek as a conciliar fellowship of local Churches truly united, one would be abandoning the goal of organic unity. But it is not either/or. All that was being attempted was progressively to describe together what this organic unity might be like. Since then, and always together, we have been pursuing this study in the context of the Faith and Order Commission, seeking to define the elements that make a local Church truly one. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, studies on Hope, on the profession of faith, on the exercise of authority, all these things help us to make progress in our perception of the different elements which weave the bonds of communion within the local Church and among local Churches.

What we are about, then, is discerning together those things which are given by God to his Church, to enable it to live, to proclaim, to hand on the new reality which is upon us. I am deeply in agreement with the Archbishop when he insists that we must constantly evaluate ecclesial institutions and ecclesial activity in terms of the mission of the Church, in terms of the reason why the Church exists: to reconcile all things with God in Christ, through the Spirit; to make the whole of humanity into a single people united in the unity of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, to speak in the language of St Cyprian; or, to speak with St Augustine – at the end there will be only one Christ, one Son loving the Father unto all eternity.

It is in this perspective that we must understand the meaning of Tradition. Tradition is the historical dimension of communion, that is, the communion through the succession of generations: as the Church pursues its pilgrimage on earth, it is always faithful to what has been given and open to the future; open to new ways of expressing the ancient faith. This involves both continuity and change. They must be kept in balance, and this involves a continuing process of discernment. The whole of the Church is engaged in this process, but at the point of decision on matters of faith and sacramental life, the episcopal college has a responsibility it can never shirk.

To be very specific, it is clear to me that among the many fruits of the dialogue that has been pursued between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion is that it has enabled us to see clearly and in proper focus the agenda that lies before us. It is really the shared discernment of the gifts of God which are the marks of the new world. We must talk about the Church, about Tradition, about Authority, questions intimately related to one another. Our dialogue on these issues will be a dialogue about the structure, the contours of the communion which is God's work in our midst. Moreover, there is no doubt in my mind that if positive results of our dialogue on Eucharist, on ministry, on salvation are to be consolidated it will be in the context of a deeper address to these questions. This study will help both to underpin the agreement already achieved and to resolve differences that are still outstanding. It is clear that this perception is shared by Anglicans. The great amount of discussion and the amount of publications on the authority question show that Anglicans see this question and the issues relating to it as needing urgent attention. The question of the nature of the unity we seek presses us to ask what are the organs that maintain and deepen unity. In recent years the Anglican Communion has paid serious attention to this issue and it is in terms of this concern that I see the significance of the Anglican Consultative Council, the meeting of Primates, and the developing role of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the ARCIC dialogue this concern was taken into a wider context when Anglicans and Catholics discussed together the nature of the universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome. The

nature of the universal primacy and the nature of the unity we seek are not issues, surely, that can be kept in isolation from one another. They are one issue and it is a question about which we may earnestly pray together. I wish to recall that last December, Pope John Paul II, in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, speaking of his own ministry, prayed that the Holy Spirit – and I quote – ‘may give his light and illuminate the pastors and theologians of our Churches, so that we may see, together evidently, the forms in which this ministry may be a service of love recognised by both sides’.

The theme of my response, then, is that the purpose of our mission is that humanity may be able to say with St Paul, ‘behold, the new has come’. It is in that perspective that I welcome the third part of the Archbishop’s address.

The Church is for mission, for the providing of that reconciliation with God and among men and women for which we all thirst. That mission is to the poor, the hungry, to those on the margins of society; it is to nations and peoples divided amongst themselves and against one another. The Church must be the instrumental sign of the human community that God wishes to bring into being. Men and women, young and old, black and white, rich and poor, are made for communion.

Our anxiety for unity and reconciliation is likewise an anxiety that we should not fail them. I pray that this Conference will bear true fruit and that that fruit may be tasted by all those whose hunger for the Word of Life, even if it is not recognised, is deep and desperate. Christians must help them to understand that ‘the new has come’.