

The Address of the Archbishop of Canterbury At St. Paul's Within the Walls

On the occasion of his visit in 1977 the Archbishop delivered the following address at the Episcopal church in Rome—

The fact that I have the privilege of dedicating these doors may be taken as a symbol of the relationship of communion and brotherhood which exists between the Episcopal Church of the United States of America and the Church of England, as indeed it does between all the churches of the Anglican Communion. That friendship is personified in the presence of Bishop Ervine Swift representing my dear friend the presiding Bishop.

The fact that His Eminence Cardinal Willebrands, representing His Holiness the Pope, presides at this service together with me is a symbol of that growing understanding which exists between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion throughout the world. In the name of that Anglican Communion I pay this visit to Rome, the third visit of an Archbishop of Canterbury, in the succession of Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher's visit in 1960 and that of Archbishop Michael Ramsey in 1966.

Let me congratulate those whose tenacity of purpose has seen this project of the doors through to completion; and let me congratulate the artists and craftsmen who have carried out the work.

What better text could I choose than that in the first Epistle to the Corinthians in which St. Paul—we meet in St. Paul's Church—speaks of a door. "A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (16:9). So runs the King James Version. "A great opportunity has opened for effective work, and there is much opposition." So runs the New English Bible translation.

What is the context of these words? It is quite straightforward. St. Paul is planning a journey to Corinth—that evil city whose name gave birth to the verb "to Corinthianize," which

meant to go to the dogs. It was not an easy place in which to establish a church, but that had been done. Bengel refers to that fact in a pregnant phrase—"the mighty paradox, the church of God at Corinth."

Now St. Paul plans to visit it again, by way of Macedonia, and possibly to spend the whole winter in the city. But first he must pursue his work at Ephesus till Whitsuntide, "for a great opportunity has opened for effective work, and there is much opposition." That opposition is understandable, for Ephesus, standing as it did on the great east-west high road, was not only the center of the worship of the great goddess Diana but of every wind of strange doctrine which blew through that city of commerce and of intellectual discussion. If Corinth was a difficult center in which to found a church, Ephesus was not much easier.

But the work of evangelism, of the preaching of the gospel and of the winning of men to its allegiance, must go on, not in spite of the difficulties but because of them. The greater the opposition and the more mountainous the barriers, the more urgent was the task. Ephesus, Corinth and the other great centers of the Greco-Roman world must be stormed and won for the crucified-risen Lord.

To that end St. Paul dedicates himself, and sets about his task with a will, in the company of a band of men in every center whose baptism had spoken to them of burial and resurrection with Christ, whose strength was found in a shared ministry of word and sacrament, and whose hearts were touched by the love of God which they experienced in the fellowship of Christ and his church.

The result of their dedication was seen in the rapid spread of the Christian faith from Jerusalem and Tarsus, through Asia Minor to Rome, and from this throughout Europe to the West and to far-away India. A great door had opened, and St. Paul and his friends entered it with a glad mind and a willing heart.

The world to which the Christian church goes in the 20th century is not unlike that to which the church went in the first. Vast multitudes even today have never heard the name of Jesus. Many of those in the favored lands where Christianity has existed for centuries only know that name as a swearword;

and others among them know so little of him as to make no intelligible sense of his religion.

In the West there is a widespread disillusion with politics and, among the more thoughtful, with materialism, as in the first century there was disillusion with the "gods many and lords many" whose images were seen in every city and town and whose relics I've seen this day in Rome. Their world was rightly described by St. Paul as "without God and without hope."

That would be a fair description of a large part of our world too. This sheer sense of disillusion constitutes for the Christian "a great door," "a great opportunity for effective work," and they are very blind who cannot see it and very callous who would not enter it. Opposition? Oh yes—in plenty. But that is no cause for hesitation. Rather is it a summons to action.

The publication, in December 1975, of the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on evangelization in the modern world, is warmly to be welcomed. It has commanded the assent, in the main thrust of its argument, of millions not only of our Roman Catholic brethren but of a great number of members of the Anglican Communion and of others besides.

Indebted as it is to such documents as those of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*, and on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, it makes it crystal clear that "those who sincerely accept the good news . . . make up a community which is in its turn evangelizing. The command to the twelve to go out and proclaim the good news is also valid for all Christians . . . Moreover, the good news of the kingdom which is coming and which has begun is meant for all people of all times.

Those who have received the good news and who have been gathered by it into the community of salvation can and must communicate and spread it" (para. 13).

Such an emphasis as this is music in the ears of those who, having read the New Testament and having seen the need

of the world for the message of the church, give priority to the task of evangelistic outreach.

What, then, is the situation of the church in our world of the late 20th century—a world growing in population at a terrifying rate and shrinking in size as the discoveries of science draw us all closer together? It is this: We find ourselves faced with an evangelistic task whose size escalates with the multiplying of the millions, (and India adds a million a month to the population), and whose strength is debilitated by our divisions.

“Talk to us about reconciliation,” says an unbelieving world, “when you yourselves are reconciled, and we will listen.” Who can blame the world for its skepticism? We have been forced to listen to that word from the world outside the church and it has added urgency to our task of seeking full unity.

At the same time, many of us have been discovering this interesting fact: that when Christians belonging to different communions of the church go out on evangelistic work together, they discover, in the course of that work, a measure of unity of which they had no inkling before. In other words, obey the Lord of the church and you will find that, in his infinite mercy, he will give you, as a kind of reward for your obedience, an experience of unity which will surprise you.

Or, to put it another way, joint evangelism is one of the most rewarding roads to Christian unity. We need not—and in view of the world’s spiritual starvation we dare not—wait until we are fully one before we give the bread of the Christian message in which as Christians we share to a hungry world and before we do that giving together. I express the hope that the coming months and years will see a great growth in joint evangelistic outreach to those totally untouched, or only superficially touched, by the gospel.

It is at this point that we come to a matter of great importance and, I believe, of great urgency. Behind us lies a task well done. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission has done good work in producing the three agreed statements on the eucharist, on ministry and ordination, and on authority in the church. It is to be hoped that these will be studied at the so-called grassroots level, lest there be too

large a gap between the thinking of the theologians and that of the people in our pews.

Before us lies a period of further exploration and study, in which we pursue the gains which we have already made and develop further the understanding of what we have in common and of the difficulties and differences which still perplex us.

Around us, as we have already said, is a world of doubt and cynicism and, very frequently, of wistful searching. To this world the Lord of the church sends us with this divine commission: “Go forth . . . make all nations my disciples; baptize. . . and teach. . . . And be assured, I am with you always, to the end of time.”

These things being so, I ask this question: Has not the time now arrived when we have reached such a measure of agreement on so many of the fundamentals of the gospel that a relationship of shared communion can be encouraged by the leadership of both our churches? I would go further and ask whether our work of joint evangelization will not be seriously weakened until we are able to go to that work strengthened by our joint participation in the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood? The day must come when together we kneel and receive from one another’s hands the tokens of God’s redeeming love and then directly go, again, to the world which Christ came to redeem.

“The day must come,” I said. In many places around the world, as those of us who travel know perfectly well, the day has already come. Without waiting for official sanction (indeed sometimes *with* local official sanction), Roman Catholics are receiving the sacrament of holy communion at the hands of Anglican bishops and priests, and the reverse is also the case as I perceive it. This, I venture to believe, will increasingly take place, whether official sanction in the highest quarters be given or no. Has not the time, God’s time, for such official sanction arrived? I think it has.

I am not asking for a blurring of the issues—and they are not inconsiderable—on which, at present, we cannot agree. Truth is not advanced by pretending not to see the divisions and disagreements which still exist. The search must go on

together. But I believe both will be crowned with greater success when we say to one another in love and charity: "We do not want indiscipline in the Church of God. We desire that all things be done decently and in order. We can no longer be separated at the sacrament of unity. We are all sinners in need of the forgiveness and strength of our Lord. We will kneel *together* to receive it."

Rome — April 28, 1977