



NEWS

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DATE: October 29, 1975

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FOR RELEASE IN A.M.S OF
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31

ANGLICAN/CATHOLIC COMMISSION ISSUES, STATEMENT ON 'PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH'

WASHINGTON--A group of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops and theologians, charged with pursuing the goal of organic unity between the two communions, have issued a statement expressing "substantial agreement" about the purpose of the Church.

"We have uncovered no essential points on which we differ," the statement says. It adds: "And we know, also that insofar as the Church appears visibly divided, its purpose is obscured, its mission impeded, and its witness weakened. We yearn, therefore, for a restoration of the unity that will serve our common purpose."

The Agreed Statement on the Purpose of the Church was issued by the Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission in the U.S.A., which has been meeting since 1965 under the auspices of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations of the Episcopal Church. The co-chairmen of the Commission are Rt. Reverend Arthur A. Vogel, Episcopal Bishop of

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West Missouri, and Most Rev. Charles H. Helmsing, Bishop of the Catholic diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo.

The co-chairmen said the document carries with it only the authority of the participants in the dialogue, and expressed the hope that it would be studied and responded to by the churches. "We hope other Christians will be interested in our efforts also," they stated.

"It is our hope that, through the appropriate authoritative means, both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Communion will recognize the 'faith of the Church' in the fruit of our dialogue, and that this agreed statement will be another step hastening the day that we will be truly one according to the mind and heart of Christ the Lord," they said.

The Agreed Statement on the Purpose of the Church is cast in terms of "our common belief about the Church's purpose or mission...in a context interwoven with prayers from our contemporary Eucharistic liturgies." Throughout the statement, liturgical texts used in the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches are presented in parallel columns in order to assist the reader "to reflect upon the relationship between prayer and belief."

The statement says "Roman Catholics and Episcopalians believe that there is but one Church of Christ, yet we find ourselves living in separate churches."

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Citing "many elements of sanctification and truth" which "possess an inner dynamism toward Catholic unity," the document asserts that "our estrangement of four centuries has been far from complete.

The document says recent authoritative statements and liturgical texts of both churches show a "remarkable convergence" in answers to questions revolving around the matter of the purpose of the Church.

Noting that many persons today have raised the question of whether the Church has abandoned its spiritual calling, the statement says such "bewilderment" is rooted in part in the churches' concern with unjust systems and structures, and, on the other hand, in "new responses to the Spirit within our churches."

"In our re-examination, we need to be constantly reminded that 'the Church is not a man-made society of like-minded people who are trying to live Christian lives and to exert some kind of Christian influence upon the world'," the statement says. "Rather, it is a community created and called by God. Its task is evangelization and salvation: to be an instrument of God's work in the world focused in the saving and liberating mission of Jesus Christ. It must, therefore, look to him for the example and style of its mission and to the Holy Spirit for the power to accomplish it."

"The first thing the Church should be doing here and now is proclaiming the Gospel," the statement

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declares. "The original Gospel was not only a message preached but also a life lived," it continues, "and for this reason our proclamation today must involve not only preaching in words but also witness in deeds."

"The imperative of viewing the Church's purpose in the context of 'Service' (diakonia) has deep roots both in Holy Scripture and in the documents of our respective traditions," the statement says. "While this call to serve others and to place our resources at the service of others is recognized and widely discussed in each of our churches, we must confess that it does not appear that either of us has yet found the means to carry out this aspect of mission as successfully as we might."

Thus "one of the major challenges facing our churches is the cultivation of an awareness of 'unjust systems and structures' that oppress human freedom, maintain situations of gross inequality, and facilitate individual selfishness," the statement asserts. "Forms of Christian service which do not take these structures into account are not adequate for the complexities of our day."

"The Church, the Body of Christ in the world, is led by the Spirit into all nations to fulfill the purpose of the Father," the statement concludes. "Insofar as it faithfully preaches the Gospel of salvation, celebrates the sacraments, and manifests the love of God in service, the Church becomes more perfectly one with the risen Christ."

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