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ROME AND CANTERBURY - UNITY, DIVERSITY AND COMPREHENSIVENESS

1. United not Absorbed

Just over fifty years ago the Bishops of the Anglican Communion saw little hope of unity with Rome. They regretted that Pius XI appeared to contemplate 'complete absorption' (in his Encyclical Mortalium Animos of 1928) as the only method of achieving unity. The bishops of that 1930 Lambeth Conference were particularly disappointed because the approach of the Malines Conversations had been set aside: that approach had encouraged the Anglican Church to think about being united, not absorbed. At the penultimate Malines Conversation in 1925 Cardinal Mercier had read the paper 'L'Eglise Anglicane Unie non Absorbée'. It had been prepared by an 'anonymous canonist'. It attracted immediate attention. Some of the details of the paper, now known to have been written by Dom Lambert Beauduin, seem rather fanciful today: his stress on the Pallium - a woollen stole blessed by the Pope for Archbishops which caused no end of prelatical rivalry in the Middle Ages; his contention that progress towards unity would be wrecked over the question of the precedence of Archbishops of Canterbury over Cardinals or vice-versa - Cardinal Basil Hume and I will not lose much sleep over this. Nor did he really take seriously enough the indigenous English Roman Catholic tradition: on his view the new Sees created at and

after the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in 1850 would simply be suppressed. Yet in spite of serious flaws - which were seen by the Lambeth Fathers in 1930 - the paper remains significant, because it is the first clear recognition that the Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound to seek a unity which respects their autonomous tradition. It is a first systematic essay on the kind of unity Rome and Canterbury seek. The nineteenth century debate had focussed on 'Anglican Orders'. In the eighteenth century an Archbishop of Canterbury thought of a union with an independent Gallican Church. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries both sides saw unity in terms of the Crown imposing a statutory uniformity. So, in spite of its over-simplifications, Beauduin's essay makes its point: we can't tolerate an Anglican Church separated from Rome and we can't tolerate an Anglican Church absorbed by Rome: the Anglican Church, united not absorbed.

2. Unity and Diversity

However, once this is admitted as a fruitful approach (and such an approach was publicly endorsed by the late Pope Paul VI more than once) an immediate question arises: what range of diversity is compatiable with unity, or to put the matter another way, what are the limits of acceptable diversity. The question has to be asked in any ecumenical discussion. It is a particularly pressing question for any Church in dialogue with Rome because of the Roman tendency towards an authoritarian centralization and uniformity. Forgive me for making this point somewhat crudely.

The character and model of the Church in the dominant Roman tradition owes a great deal to its origin and location in the centre of a great Empire. Many of the detailed administrative practices, legal systems and even archives survived to mould the minds of the architects of the original Papal monarchy. The tendency of such an order is to favour a stable ideology, both communicated and enforced by a bureaucracy functioning according to juridical models. The precondition of the system was the Latin language which became even more useful to the Roman Curia after it had died as a living language. An ideological stability is easier to maintain through the medium of a fixed language. The changes in living languages are always subversive to unchanging theological definitions - words do not only change their meaning in a living language, they change their resonances and their place in a cultural economy. The collapse of the Latin culture over the past two decades, the liturgical changes within the Roman Catholic Church, the new confidence of the non-European cultures into whose languages Christian truth needs to be baptized - all mean that the problem of perceiving unity in inescapable diversity is now a pressing one for the Roman Church which for so long has been able to fend off the difficulty by reducing diversity to matters of ornament and detail. The Anglican Church has to face the problems of serious diversity - but the Roman Church has to face problems of unity.

Not surprisingly we have both been having a hard look together at the New Testament and the Early Church.

3. The New Testament

But once we examine the New Testament - or listen to the siren voices of New Testament scholarship - we are confronted by an immediate and serious problem. There is no one New Testament picture of anything. To put it bluntly we are presented with such a bewildering diversity that we begin to doubt whether the concept of unity may not be a reading back of later Orthodoxy. Indeed, the German New Testament specialist Ernst Käsemann writes as follows:

> "The New Testament Canon does not, as such, constitute the foundation of the unity of the Church. On the contrary, as such, it provides the basis for the multiplicity of the Confessions."

What, then, can the New Testament teach us about unity in diversity?

Let me take the most important example of New Testament diversity - the clash between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity, the first serious threat to the unity of the Church. Some of the New Testament documents, notably St. Matthew's Gospel and the Epistle of St.James, strongly affirm the continuing validity of the Law of Moses and reject the teaching of St.Paul. You will remember that it is in St. Matthew that not one 'jot or tittle' of the law will disappear (Matt.5:17-19) and that Luther found James' treatment of the Pauline doctrine of Justification by Faith so unacceptable that he branded his letter an 'Epistle of Straw'. Indeed Jewish Christianity in the New Testament looks very much like what later became the heretical Jewish Christian sects, for example, the Ebionites.

At the other end of the New Testament spectrum, especially in St. Paul and St.John, we find a certain speculative interaction with the philosophical theology of Hellenistic society. In St.John's Gospel in particular we see a recurring contrast between light and darkness, above and below, spirit and flesh, which is typical of Hellenistic dualism, and characteristic of the later Gnostic syncretism.

Yet in spite of this very sharp diversity, a profound unity can also be discerned between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity: that unity is the developing understanding of Christ himself. Jewish Christianity in the New Testament was already moving away from a purely Jewish understanding of Christ. Jesus in St.Matthew's Gospel is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God' (16:15-17) and the birth narrative excludes an understanding of Jesus merely in terms of being a 'prophet'. In Hellenistic Christianity Paul preaches an uncongenial 'crucified Christ' (cf. I Cor. 2:1-5) and John insists that the Word has become 'flesh' (1:14). However contrasting their expressions, Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity were fundamentally united in their identification of the crucified Jesus with the exalted Lord and this identification lies behind the earliest Christological titles, in whichever Christian milieu they have their origin: Messiah; Son of Man; Son of God; Lord.

Donald Mackinnon using different examples of diversity once summed up the basic unity of the New Testament like this:

> "We cannot conjure the Jesus of Luke out of the Jesus of Mark, but we can see standing behind them both,

shaping, controlling and even twisting their narratives, the sure hand of the one they strive to bear witness to in the fellowship of the Spirit."

4. The Early Church

When we turn to the Early Church we have the impression that instead of looking for unity in diversity we are now looking for diversity in unity. From the point of view of the emergent Great Church, Fathers and heretics could be neatly separated - dads and cads as G.L. Prestige used to say. Schism was not in the Church but out of it.

The question is now not how much diversity can be found in a general study of early Christian history but how much diversity can be found within the undivided communion of the Great Church of the first centuries. This appeal must not be uncriticial, as if there were no divisions, no schisms, and all was sweetness and light. But no Church historian could think that. Yet there is still a certain cogency in speaking of the undivided Church - whether one draws a line at the separation of the Oriental Churches from Byzantine Orthodoxy (a schism between Greek speaking and Semitic speaking Churches), or the later division between Rome and Constantinople (where language and culture again played their part in the cleavage between the Greek and Latin Churches). The point of an appeal to an 'undivided tradition', however defined, is that once any Christian tradition develops in isolation from the wider Church its doctrine and life begins to be less than fully catholic - according to the whole.

What can we learn about diversity in unity from the early and undivided tradition of the Catholic Church? I don't want to offer purely liturgical or even disciplinary examples - even though disputes about new liturgies in both Churches raise a lot of steam and marriage discipline or clerical celibacy touch even more sensitive areas. The real issue, however, is the problem of theological and doctrinal pluralism. Was, and is, it possible to have unity in faith and difference in its expression?

This question was posed in its sharpest way for the Early Church in the Christological dispute between Antioch and Alexandria in the fifth century. At the risk of over-simplification: Alexandrine Christology stressed the unity of the Incarnate Christ; Antiochene Christology stressed the reality of Jesus' humanity and so saw a distinction in the Incarnate Lord. The Council of Chalcedon was a proper compromise which sought to do justice to the insights of both schools: one person in two natures. But the disputes before and after the Council were more than usually influenced by personalities and ecclesiastical empire building.

Having said this, just before the Council we have a very significant recognition of theological and even doctrinal pluralism in one communion. In 433 two of the major protagonists exchanged remarkable letters: Cyril of Alexandria and John of Antioch. John wrote to Cyril and sent him his confession of faith. Though the letter was irenic, it contained the noraml Antiochene theology of the 'two natures'

of Christ - directed explicitly against Cyril's 'one nature' - but at the same time he clearly states the unity of the 'person' of Christ and the consequent legitimacy of describing Mary as 'Mother of God'. Cyril, a real hard-liner and no woolly-minded ecumenist, replied with great generosity and rejoiced that they shared a common faith and his reply was canonized by the Council fourteen years later. As Fr. Emmanuel Lanne puts it, Cyril "accepted a profession of faith in which the theological perspect ve was not his own".

Another example, of a different kind, which is actually found in the Creed shows the Early Church quite prepared to be reticent in defining the faith for the sake of unity. One of the reasons for convening the Council of Constantinople in 381 (we celebrate its sixteenth hundredth anniversary this year) was to settle the disputed status of the Holy Spirit. Was the Holy Spirit a creature, or, on the contrary, like the Son, of the same 'substance' as the Father and so properly to be called God. The majority of the Council were clear enough that the Holy Spirit was indeed 'of one being' with the Father and many were happy to go on and say He was God. Yet the form accepted and which we still use in the Creed was much more reticent:

> "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets."

This cautious phraseology accords very much with the teaching and 'ecumenical' sensitivity of St.Basil the Great. Basil was concerned to defend the legitimacy of the Church's worship of the Spirit, but - in John Kelly's phrase - 'practised diplomatic caution' in his actual language about the Spirit.

Once again different ways of expressing the faith, even in so central a matter as the divinity of the Holy Spirit, are compatible with unity.

5. Anglican Comprehensiveness

The point of our exploration of these aspects of the unity and diversity of the New Testament and Early Church has been to show that, far from being incompatible with unity, a very wide diversity is found among the earliest Christian communities and that even when the Church developed its structures in a more unified way in the centuries which followed, this did not necessarily entail the acceptance of identical expressions of faith. In now going on to speak of Anglican Comprehensiveness I do not wish to insinuate that the Anglican tradition is the direct or only heir to the Primitive Church. Nor do I want to suggest that Anglican Comprehensiveness is the only possible way of achieving unity in diversity today. I do want to suggest, however, that the unity and diversity presented to us by the Church of the New Testament and the Fathers may put Anglican Comprehensiveness, when rightly understood, in a more favourable light, as well as indicating the range of diversity feasible in any Anglican/Roman Catholic union.

At the English Reformation a number of forces were at work. There was a new Nationalism and a 'Godly Prince' to embody it. There was the desire for vernacular Scriptures and Liturgy. There was the influence of the Continental Reformation, at first Lutheran but later Calvinistic. And there was a wish by many to preserve a continuity with the Church of the previous centuries. The Elizabethan Settlement was a more or less conscious attempt to comprehend within the Church of England all those who would accept the Scriptures, the Creeds, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, a liturgy and the threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons. To achieve this comprehension it was absolutly necessary to make a clear distinction between fundamentals and non-fundamentals - a distinction probably taken from the 'ecumenical' Lutheran reformer Melancthon. The clearest expression of this distinction is found as recently as the 1968 Lambeth Conference:

> "Comprehensiveness demands agreement on fundamentals, while tolerating disagreement on matters in which the Church may differ without feeling the necessity of breaking communion."

Yet immediately the distinction is made an urgent question arises: where is the line to be drawn? At the close of the sixteenth century and during the seventeenth century, in the polemic with both Puritans and Recusants, the classical Anglican answer to this question emerged. The answer gave Anglicanism its distinctive ethos. Its characteristics were:

First, that the common Reformed appeal to Scripture was tempered by the role of Tradition, not, of course, as an additional source of Revelation, but as a sure guide to the uncertainties of Scriptural interpretation. As a result of this the study of the Fathers had great importance - with the interesting result that eventually the doctrine of the Incarnation became more central to main stream Anglicanism than Justification by Faith.

Next, that there was an appeal to Reason which reflected the assurance of Renaissance Humanism - an appeal powerfully developed by Richard Hooker and others. The Enlightenment, too, eventually became a characteristic of Anglican thought.

Finally, that doctrine was presented in the liturgical worship of the Church. The lex orandi was the guide to the lex credendi. Unlike other Reformed Churches the Prayer Book was a formula of faith.

Now these three characteristics were and are by no means exclusively Anglican but their particular combination gave Anglican theology, spirituality and pastoral practice its distinctive stamp. They gave Anglicanism not so much a distinctive theological content as a distinctive theological method. Hence, Richard Hooker wrote about methodology and precisely entitled it Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. He did mot write a systematic Summa or an Anglican version of John Calvin's Institutes.

"In the mind of an Anglican, comprehensiveness is not compromise" - so said the 1968 Lambeth Conference. Rightly understood it is the achievement of unity in diversity through the distinction of the essential from the non-essential by

means of the Holy Scriptures interpreted by Tradition, in the light of Reason, all expressed in and through the corporate worship of the Church.

6. Criticisms

In suggesting that Anglican Comprehensiveness (and the distinction between fundamentals and non-fundamentals it entails) is a legitimate way of expressing the unity in diversity we find in the New Testament and Early Church, I am aware of a vulnerability to sharp criticism. Yes, a Roman Catholic or Orthodox critic will say, it sounds all right but its a paper system - what kind of unity can we have with Anglicans, some of whom seem to believe nothing at all and professional teachers at that. Or it will be said that the party strife in the Church of England between 'catholic', 'evangelical' and 'liberal' is so sharp as to negate internal Anglican unity, let alone unity with Rome.

The first thing to say here is that Anglicans themselves make similar self-criticisms. Professor Stephen Sykes' important book The Integrity of Anglicanism is on target here.

The second thing to say is that 'abuse does not take away the use of a thing' - a remark seventeenth century Anglicans were always addressing to the Puritans. There are some Anglicans who seem to be saying that there are no fundamentals at all - or rather that one can never be certain what they are. Anglicanism depends, on the contrary, on the possibility

of a public distinction being made and embodied in the worship of the Church. To refuse to draw the line anywhere or to draw it in a highly personal and idiosyncratic way is in fact to abandon the classical Anglican method I have described. Now I have no wish to be over-simplistic - it is obvious to all Christians that there is a general crisis of doctrinal authority. The crisis has arisen for many reasons but not least because of the acceptance of biblical criticism - and we can do no other. There is also a growing realization that some degree of 'doctrinal' or credal criticism also has to be accepted. Add to these the contemporary lack of trust in human reason and the seventeenth century Anglican appeal to Scripture, Tradition and Reason looks less secure. So I am not a classical Anglican fundamentalist and want no witch hunts. To quote the 1968 Lambeth Conference again: "Comprehensiveness implies a willingness to allow liberty of interpretation, with a certain slowness in arresting or restraining exploratory thinking".

The third thing to say is that in spite of some impressions to the contrary Comprehensiveness does not imply that plain contradiction can be a normal expression of Anglican diversity. Stephen Sykes has suggested that from the latter part of the nineteenth century, aided and abetted by F.D.Maurice, Comprehensiveness has come to be thought of in almost Hegelian terms: Catholic thesis, Protestant antithesis and Anglican synthesis. No doubt there is a real truth in the idea of "a continuing search for the whole truth" in which Protestant and Catholic emphases "will find complete reconciliation" (Lambeth Conference 1968). But this idea has to be recognised

as a modern one. It is quite alien to original Anglican thought that there could be logically opposite expressions of faith in fundamentals. To be an Anglican is not to be content with self-contradiction.

Lastly, Comprehensiveness properly understood as the distinction between fundamentals and non-fundamentals will be seen to be not unrelated to the doctrine of the 'hierarchy of truths', canonised by the Second Vatican Council, the implications of which have not yet been fully worked out.

7. Questions for the Future

I began with the idea of the Anglican Church united not absorbed. In the light of my very Anglican appeal to Scripture and the Early Church, and of my attempt to relate Anglican Comprehensiveness to the unity and diversity I believe we find there, I want to conclude by suggesting some questions Anglicans should now be asking Roman Catholics in order to elucidate what unity not absorption would mean.

Some hard questions must be asked about Vatican centralization. As early as the close of the second century Pope Victor was threatening the excommunication of the whole of the Asian episcopate because they kept Easter on a different date from the West. Fortunately Irenaeus put him right. But the tendency to uniformity still seems to be a Roman attitude of mind (for the reasons I mentioned earlier). The Uniat Churches in the U.S.A. are forbidden the married clergy they have had from time out of mind in the Middle East because this clashes with 'Latin' canon law. Or, to bring the matter nearer home, how much freedom does the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference of England and Wales have to pursue moral and

pastoral initiatives culturally relevant to the mission of Christ in this country. To put it more directly, would Anglicans be expected to accept the 'Latin' attitudes and rulings of the various Vatican Congregations? The question is acute when we consider moral issues relating to particular interpretations of Natural Law and the anglo-saxon tradition of the informed Christian conscience.

Ultimately, the theological question can be put like this: what is involved (and what is not involved) in acceptance of the universal ministry of the Bishop of Rome; is this ministry not solely concerned with the basic unity of the faith in the world-wide communion of the Churches and their God-given diversity; would this mean, at the most, a form of universal presidency in charity when essential matters of faith are at stake; what relation, then, would the Vatican have to the various Synods of the Anglican Communion. There are, therefore, some questions about the Anglican acceptance of a universal primacy which cannot be answered until Anglicans and Roman Catholics have come to some consensus on what acceptance actually involves.

Beauduin saw something of this even in the 1920s and expressed it in the concluding words of his paper:

> "What will Rome think of this plan? It is clear that it suggests a principle of decentralization which is not in accordance with the actual tendencies of the Roman Curia, a principle that could have other applications. Would it not be a good and a great good? Yet would Rome be of this opinion? Nothing can allow us to foresee what would be the answer."

Beauduin did not know how Rome would react to his question. In any case in the 1920s it was certainly premature. But we are now at the stage of dialogue where the hard questions need to be put - and Rome will have some tough questions to put to Anglicans as well. In this exchange both traditions will be purified and renewed. Both will have something to give to the other.

In putting a few Anglican questions in the light of the New Testament and the Early Church and arguing that Anglican Comprehensiveness does not mean Anglicans have no faith, I don't think you will assume that I am not absolutely committed to Anglican/Roman Catholic unity. I ask questions precisely because I am, and deeply so, for both personal and theological reasons. It is therefore my profound hope that when the present successor of Pope Gregory comes to this country next year St.Augustine's present successor and he will be able to take a step together towards that unity - towards the mutual exchange which will show both traditions more clearly what visible structures that unity in diversity requires.

... view the new Sees created at and