# *The Ecumenical Significance of the Visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Holy Father*

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The lecture which I am going to give you contains the following points: I would like first to explain some things regarding the Anglican Communion and then I would like to talk about the importance of the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury, its historical aspect, its ecumenical importance, its spiritual and religious importance and also its immediate results among which is this Anglican Centre where we are at this moment.

### *The Anglican Communion*

On the occasion of the opening of this Centre we have among us a delegation which does not only represent the Church of England, but it represents the Anglican Communion as it is spread throught the whole world. We have here the Executive Seretary of the Anglican Communion, the Bishop of Gibraltar, the Bishop of Ripon, the Bishop of Milwaukee in the United States, the Archdeacon of Dublin and others, Canon Latimer of Toronto, Canada, for example. We have here a representation of the whole Anglican Communion and in particular of the Anglican Church here in Rome. This is important because although the Centre wishes to establish contact between the Roman Catholic Church as a whole with the Anglican Communion as a whole, this contact will take place here in Rome.

The Anglican Communion which was the first to accept officially the invitation to send observers to the Second Vatican Council can be described in the following manner. It is a communion — a fellowship, a word which is most difficult for me to translate into French — let us say then that it is communion with the one, holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is composed of dioceses, provinces and regional churches established in communion with the See of Canterbury and these churches have in common the following characteristics. They maintain and propagate the catholic and apostolic faith and order as these are generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer, to the extent that its authority is accepted by the various Churches. They are individual and national Churches and promote in their territories the national expression of Christian faith, life and worship. They are linked together not by a central legislative or administrative authority, but by mutual loyalty supported by a joint Council of the Bishops in conference known as the « Lambeth Conference » which meets regularly every ten years.

### *The Lambeth Conference*

The first meeting took place in 1867 with seventy-six bishops present. The creation of the Lambeth Conference did not take place without difficulty. Some Bishops, including the Archbishop of York, feared that the Archbishop of Canterbury was creating this instrument in order to dominate the Anglican Communion in a fashion which we may call ' papal ', a structure that was not wanted and which they felt must be avoided. The Archbishop of York was not even present at the first meeting of the Lambeth Conference and for the same reason others stayed away as well. However, when it was explained and confirmed in practice that this conference was not in any sense a legislative body with executive authority over the Churches of the Anglican Communion this misunderstanding or fear was dissipated. Now there is universal participation by the Churches of the Anglican Communion at the Lambeth Conference.

The last meeting took place in 1958 under the chairmanship of Archbishop Fisher, then Archbishop of Canterbury. The worldwide and international character of the Anglican Communion ought to be stressed; this is shown by the many prelates from various nations who make up the Lambeth Conference. Even in England, people coming from the Continent identify the Anglican Communion too often with the Church of England. In England there are two provinces of the Anglican Communion, those of Canterbury and York. Besides these there is the Church in Wales, the Episcopal Church in Scotland and also the Church of Ireland in the British Isles. Other member-Churches are the Episcopal

* This is an English translation from the French of the address of Bishop Willebrands at the opening of the *Centro Anglicano* in Rome, October 5th, 1966. The editors of Unitas are indebted to Canon John Findlow for the Bishop's text.

Church of the United States, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon. These are all individual provinces properly constituted into dioceses. Also there are the Church of England in Australia, the Church of the Province of New Zealand, the Church of the Province of South Africa, the Church or the Province of the West Indies, the Church in Japan, the Church in China, the Church of the Province of West Africa, the Church of the Province of Central Africa, also of North Africa; the Archbishopric of Jerusalem, the Church of the Province of East Africa, the Church of the Province of Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. There is also the Episcopalian Church in Brazil. Likewise there are several dioceses which are under the direct jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

One can see then that the Anglican Communion is very much wider than the Church of England alone. Each Church, Province and diocese of the Anglican Communion maintains its independence, yet organic unity is expressed through the Lambeth Conference. The relationships between the Church of England and other Churches are carried out through the Council on Foreign Relations. Within this Council, a special Commission has been set up for Relations with the Catholic Church. I think that now because these relationships exist on a world-wide basis, this Commission will not be quite sufficient since it was created to handle affairs in Britain only. Now that dialogue on a wider scale is to be undertaken, it will be necessary for both sides to have a much more expressive representation of the universal Church. The opportunity to establish a new organisation for contact with the Roman Catholic Church now presents itself.

### *Anglicans in Ecumenism*

The Church of England, like the whole of the Anglican Communion, has participated from the beginning in the Ecumenical Movement. You will recall that at the International Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910, Anglican Bishop Charles Brent played a decisive role. He was also the Chairman of the Faith and Order Conference at Lausanne in 1927. The Edinburgh meeting (the Catholic Church did not participate as we know, but this was only the beginning of the World Council of Churches) of missionaries from all over the world and from Churches of various persuasions pointed out to him the futility of Churches working in opposition to each other. He saw that the missionary's aim of spreading the Gospel was hindered by this, and that nothing constructive was being accomplished for Christian Unity. He



clearly saw the need for the restoration of Unity among all Christians. In his mind there was a plan which later became the Conference on Faith and Order, and still later the World Council of Churches.

Following in the tradition of Bishop Brent, the Archbishop of Canterbury at present is one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches. Furthermore, the Chairman of the Faith and Order section is Bishop Tomkins, another Anglican. The section on Evangelism is headed by still another Anglican, Bishop Sadiq from India. Without doubt we can see a living, active and convinced participation by Anglicans in the Ecumenical Movement. At the General Meeting of the World Council of Churches which is to take place in Upsala in 1968, among the delegates there will be 80 from the Anglican Communion who will have fifth place in numerical importance.

In their contacts with the Catholic Church, Anglican ecclesiastical authorities wish to have a dialogue on two levels. A distinction should be drawn between international contacts and national contacts such as those that exist between the Church of England and the Catholic Church in England and between the Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church in the United States. One can and should organize national contacts wherever this is possible and desireable, particularly in Australia and Canada. Obviously Catholic participation in these dialogues at the national level should be directed by the National Catholic Hierarchy. A good example of this are the official contacts going on in the United States.

In addition to dialogue on the national level, an international dialogue on a world-wide scale between the Anglican Church as a whole and the Roman Catholic Church as a whole is desireable. This dialogue will be organised on the one hand by the Secretariat at Lambeth Palace through the Council on Foreign Relations authorised by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his capacity as chairman of the Lambeth Conference, and on the other hand by the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity here in Rome with the authorization of the Pope. We have acted in the same way with regard to other Church hodies, for example: with the World Lutheran Federation, with the World Methodist Council as well as with the World Council of Churches .

### *Background to the Visit*

Having described the Anglican Communion, and its historic and important participation in the Ecumenical Movement, I should

like now to talk to you about the visit here of the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is interesting to recall that the last Archbishop of Canterbury to be received by the Pope in Rome when our two Communions were in full and perfect communion was Archbishop Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1396 to 1414. He was received by Pope Boniface IX in 1397 when he was exiled from England because of his opposition to King Richard II. He returned to Canterbury in 1399 and became the Chancellor of King Henry IV. The next Archbishop of Canterbury to visit a sovereign Pontiff at Rome was Archbishop Fisher. This visit to Pope John XXIII on December 2nd, 1960, can be regarded as a response to the establishment of Secretariat for the Unity of Christians. I remember receiving a letter from Canon Satterthwaite, even before I came to Rome although I had already been nominated as secretary of the Secretariat. He wished to see me to discuss an important question. We met in London prior the sessions of the World Council of Churches at St. Andrews. The question was: is it thinkable that the Archbishop of Canterbury should pay a visit to the Pope?

The Archbishop wished to make a pilgrimage to the Holy City of Jerusalem, to the Oecumenical Patriarch at Constantinople, and possibly to the Pope in Rome. I could only reply that I would be happy to pass the enquiry to the President of the Secretariat, Cardinal Bea, who would transmit the request to His Holiness. The Pope, as you know, was very happy to receive the Archbishop of Canterbury. This visit was a courtesy call, made in the course of the Archbishop's pilgrimage to the Holy City and made in the spirit of the Vatican Council. The importance of this gesture must be evaluated in the light of the centuries which passed since there had been contact between the two Sees. On the one hand this could only be a modest gesture, but the gesture itself implied the beginning of a new epoch between the two Churches. I recall that after his visit to the Pope Archbishop Fisher wished to visit the President of the Secretariat, saying, « I am convinced that although we men will pass away this work will not disappear. » He could see the future and wished to inaugurate it with this amicable gesture.

### *Archbishop Ramsey's Visit*

Just as the visit of Archbishop Fisher had a profound ecumenical significance and was a response to the announcement of the creation of the Secretariat for Unity, so Archbishop Ramsey wished to respond to the Council itself. When he expressed the



wish to meet the Pope very soon after his election, he made it clear that he wished to carry out this gesture only after the conclusion of the Vatican Council. It was very tactful of him — not only because immediately after the Council there would be a large number of conversations on the decisions of the Council, but also because during the Session, when we had whole weeks full of tension within the Church. he did not wish either to intervene or to give the appearance of intervening, or perhaps to create new tensions by the visit itself. He wished to wait for the moment when the Church had completed its work, and then only to make a visit if the work of the Council rendered it desirable.

I think it can be said that by the very fact that he wanted to make the visit, he felt the Council's texts constituted a basis for dialogue between the two Churches. Certainly this did not imply that the Archbishop, as President of the Lambeth Conference, or that the Anglican Churches wished to accept all the decisions taken by the Council, but only that the final texts formed a basis for dialogue. I think this is of great importance. Just as Archbishop Fisher after his visit wished to continue his presence here by sending a representative of the two Sees of Canterbury and York to Rome to follow very closely the preparatory work of the Council, so Archbishop Ramsey changed the character of this representation by saying that the representative would be the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his capacity as Chairman of the Lambeth Conference. In a certain and very real sense he represents at the Holy See the whole of the Anglican Church. The Council itself and Pope John XXIII and Paul VI indicated that the reintegration of all Christians wished for by the Lord was a principal object of the Council. This makes it important for relations to be established on the basis of the Conciliar texts because one of the principal objects of the Council was to seek out with others that unity desired by Christ.

### *The Historic Importance of the Visit*

The historical importance of this solemn and public act by the Chairman of the Lambeth Conference is not difficult to evaluate. It was precisely in this sense that the Pope understood and underlined the historic importance of the visit. He said in his speach in the Sistine Chapel:

« We are very conscious of the different aspects of this event, and first of all We do not hesitate to stress the historical importance of this moment. It seems to Us to be great, almost dramatic. And happy too, if we think of the long and painful story which it is putting to an end, and it is a new development which can be a prelude in the relations between Rome and Canterbury. From now on, friendship must inspire and guide us. »

The progress of the visit itself confirms its value. In forty-eight hours the two Heads of Churches met three times. The solemn meeting in the Sistine Chapel with an exchange of speeches announced to the world their brotherly intentions, Christian hopes and wishes despite all of the difficulties. Following that there was the private meeting which gave rise to an intimate conversation about mutual interests, serious difficulties, and the points of agreement between the two Churches. Finally there was the meeting for prayer at the Basilica of St. Paul where they issued a joint statement. Has there ever been a meeting at Rome so official and so solemn in character which in so limited a space of time gave rise to events of such great importance? I remember that in preparing for this meeting the Pope wished that a very special protocol be worked out which would characterize the event as a visit of one Church to another and not as a meeting of Heads in a consecrated spot — the Sistine Chapel — and for this reason the visit was concluded in prayer. Finally, it was not a simple courtesy visit, or merely one of friendship, but a serious visit where the two Heads of Churches saw each other only in the presence of interpreters to speak openly in frank brotherly style of the concerns, of the differences and of the difficulties of these two Churches. The fact that this was at all possible is a cause to give thanks to God.

### *The Holy Spirit and Unity*

It can be said that the inauguration of the dialogue between the Anglican Church and the Church of Rome took place in the conversation between the Holy Father and the Archbishop at the time of their private meeting. The two had a real dialogue. The Archbishop led the Anglican Communion into dialogue with Rome which had opened its doors to him. He had brought the Anglican Communion into joint prayer with our Church. He manifested the Christian spiritual communion which exists between us. This was begun at the highest level by the two Heads of the Churches. The nature of dialogue calls for listening to one another — and for accepting together a search after truth in order to arrive at the unity wished for and given by Christ, a search which can be spoken of with one single voice.

Theology after the Council of Trent was characterised by opposition. The difficulties were characteristic of that time because they came to be in that period. The opposition that existed indicated the controversies about errors that both sides accused the other of. The consequence was withdrawal and partiality in explaining doctrine. Judgements were made too. The other side was always the enemy. He was above all an enemy rather than a brother. Today, thanks to God, all this has changed. Today persons of the other side are above all brothers and then, only possible opponents. Instead of overcoming the causes of the separation, there was a further widening of the gap. Distrust did not permit charity to show itself. Just as partiality and mistrust cling together, so also do truth and charity. The source of Christian truth and charity is the Spirit of the Lord. The movement for unity — the Ecumenical Movement — will never be understood without rising to that spring which is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Office in its Instruction of 22nd December 1949 clearly pointed this out and the joint statement of His Holiness and of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury repeated this again for us.

In the terms of their meeting the Pope and Archbishop gave thanks to God Almighty who by the action o fthe Holy Spirit created in these times a spirit of fraternity between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. If we frequently acknowledge that the Ecumenical Movement is a movement inspired by the Holy Spirit (and by the Holy Spirit we mean Love) it is necessary to find among Christians (if this movement really comes from the Holy Spirit) a greater brotherly love than existed previously. Otherwise where is the Holy Spirit and His influence? I think it is obvious that with few exceptions brotherly love in the whole world has been increased by the Vatican Council, by the movement represented by the World Council of Churches, by all that is included in what we call the Ecumenical Movement and in the prayers by which these have been inspired. We must count on the possibility that sincere and profound prayer after decades has been heard by God.

*The Ecumenical significance of the visit.*

The address of the Holy Father given in the Sistine Chapel also emphasized the ecumenical importance as well as the historic importance of the meeting. The Pope said that by looking into the ecumenical value of that meeting, we should remember the grave and complex questions which it raises and which cannot be immediately resolved. These questions remain before us in all their essential aspects. They are still very difficult, but now they can be viewed in such a way that we can meditate on and study them together without a sense of human pride, without any shadow of earthly interests, and in accordance with the word of Christ and the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Let us not at this point look for an explanation and objective understanding of doctrine but rather let us seek a knowledge of the spirituality, the life and prayer of the other Church. Christian faith does not express itself fully in its doctrine or in its creed. The Lord is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Christian Church will never be understood only by its doctrine or by structure. Spirituality and its life and prayer must be known too. Furthermore, dialogue cannot be content with a knowledge of just the appearances of a Church, a description — even if complete — of the facts of history and of practice. It is necessary to go into depth, into the fundamental tendencies which give life to the whole.

The Holy Father and the Archbishop expressed themselves in this way with the hope that Christians of each Communion might be animated by the same spirit of respect, of esteem and of brotherly love. They intended to inaugurate seriously a dialogue founded on the Gospel and the traditions of former times. Between the two Churches there exists this twofold foundation of the Gospel and the ancient traditions. Between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches both the written Gospel and a common tradition exists, and this, it seems to me, is most important. Since these traditions are common they can lead us towards that for which Christ prayed.

This unity is to be expressed in truth. This morning the Holy Father said, (cf. Unitas, vol. XVIII, n. 3, page 225) « Knowledge will bring us to charity, and charity will bring us to unity ». It is necessary therefore always to link truth and charity — truth as the basis for unity, unity in the truth. It was the Archbishop of Canterbury himself who wished this expression to be used. He maintains it always, as we know from various speeches which he has made at the World Council of Churches. Not just unity



without limits, but unity in the truth. This is what the Catholic Church also desires. As a starting point for our dialogue she has emphasized Sacred Scripture, prayer and the liturgy.

Therefore, I think that the Bishop of Ripon in his speech this morning (at the Papal audience) in saying that we shall find here in this Anglican Centre a means of exchanging and knowing our different traditions, said nothing other than what the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope already said when they spoke of our common traditions; indeed we have common traditions as well as traditions which have become different and which now separate us. I think that the Council's Decree on Ecumenism when speaking of *Fratres Disjuncti* instead of *Fratres Separati*, i. e. ' not-joined ' rather than ' separated ' brothers, did so to bring out a nuance. « Separated » means a rupture which goes to the root; « not jointed » means there is a failure, a lack of full communion, but there remains communion on the basis of baptism, of faith, of prayer and of the Bible. There is a great deal that we all gave in common. In these we find a common basis and a common tradition which unites us. But, let us remember, there are also traditions which separate us. The Holy Father said it is good to find our starting point in those things which unite us in order to find in them possible ways of overcoming everything that separates us.

I think that this Centre has actually been inaugurated twice — first by the presence and prayer of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury; and secondly today, officially, by the Anglican delegation which has come here to start it functioning. I think that this Centre which is the immediate fruit of the visit of His Grace to His Holiness will contribute by research, by studies, by conversation, to the dialogue which will be developed in the immediate future. It will contribute by personal contact, by thought, and by prayer. There is a Chapel here in this Centre, a Library and rooms which will be used as a means for arriving at that unity — even in plurality and in many forms — that unity which is in Christ. The foundation and fulfillment (of unity) must be Christ present among us by His Word and by His Sacraments, above all by the crown and accomplishment of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He waits there at that table which is not yet common to us. It is offered to us by Him as a table of fellowship. It is already sought after by us as such.

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