

The Common Declaration by Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Robert Runcie

October 2, 1989

After worshipping together in the Basilica of Saint Peter and in the Church of Saint Gregory, from where Saint Augustine of Canterbury was sent by Saint Gregory the Great to England, Pope John Paul II, Bishop of Rome, and His Grace Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, now meet again to pray together in order to give fresh impetus to the reconciling mission of God's people in a divided and broken world, and to review the obstacles which still impede closer communion between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion.

Our joint pilgrimage to the Church of Saint Gregory, with its historic association with Saint Augustine's mission to baptize England, reminds us that the purpose of the Church is nothing other than the evangelization of all peoples, nations and cultures. We give thanks together for the readiness and openness to receive the Gospel that is especially evident in the developing world, where young Christian communities joyfully embrace the faith of Jesus Christ and vigorously express a costly witness to the Gospel of the Kingdom in sacrificial living. The word of God is received, "not as the word of man, but as what it really is, the word of God" (*1 Thess 2:13*). As we enter the last decade of the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ, we pray together for a new evangelization throughout the world, not least in the continent of Saint Gregory and Saint Augustine where the progressive secularization of society erodes the language of faith and where materialism demeans the spiritual nature of humankind.

It is in such a perspective that the urgent quest for Christian unity must be viewed, for the Lord Jesus Christ prayed for the unity of his disciples "so that the world may believe" (*Jn 17:21*). Moreover Christian disunity has itself contributed to the tragedy of human division throughout the world. We pray for peace and justice, especially where religious differences are exploited for the increase of strife between communities of faith.

Against the background of human disunity the arduous journey to Christian unity must be pursued with determination and vigour, whatever obstacles are perceived to block the path. We here solemnly re-commit ourselves and those we represent to the restoration of visible unity and full ecclesial communion in the confidence that to seek anything less would be to betray our Lord's intention for the unity of his people.

This is by no means to be unrealistic about the difficulties facing our dialogue at the present time. When we established the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission in Canterbury in 1982, we were well aware that the Commission's task would be far from easy. The convergences achieved within the report of the First Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission have happily now been accepted by the Lambeth Conference of the bishops of the Anglican Communion. This report is currently also being studied by the Catholic Church with a view to responding to it. On the other hand, the question and practice of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood in some Provinces of the Anglican Communion prevents reconciliation between us even where there is otherwise progress towards agreement in faith on the meaning of the Eucharist and the ordained ministry. These differences in faith reflect important ecclesiological differences and we urge the members of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission and all others engaged in prayer and work for visible unity not to minimize these differences. At the same time we also urge them not to abandon either their hope or work for unity. At the beginning of the dialogue established here in Rome

in 1966 for our bellowed predecessors Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey, no one saw clearly how long–inherited divisions would be overcome and how unity in faith might be achieved. No pilgrim knows in advance all the steps along the path. Saint Augustine of Canterbury set out from Rome with his band of monks for what was then a distant corner of the world. Yet Pope Gregory was soon to write of the baptism of the English and of “such great miracles . . . that they seemed to imitate the powers of the apostles” (Letter of Gregory the Great to Eulogius of Alexandria). While we ourselves do not see a solution to this obstacle, we are confident that through our engagement with this matter our conversations will in fact help to deepen and enlarge our understanding. We have this confidence because Christ promised that the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth, will remain with us forever (cf. *Jn* 14:16–17).

We also urge our clergy and faithful not to neglect or undervalue that certain yet imperfect communion we already share. This communion already shared is grounded in faith in God our Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit; our common baptism into Christ; our sharing of the Holy Scriptures, of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds; the Chalcedonian definition and the teaching of the Fathers; our common Christian inheritance for many centuries. This communion should be cherished and guarded as we seek to grow into the fuller communion Christ wills. Even in the years of our separation we have been able to recognize gifts of the Spirit in each other. The ecumenical journey is not only about the removal of obstacles but also about the sharing of gifts.

As we meet together today we have also in our hearts those other Churches and Ecclesial Communities with whom we are in dialogue. As we have said once before in Canterbury, our aim extends to the fulfilment of God’s will for the visible unity of all his people.

Nor is God’s will for unity limited exclusively to Christians alone. Christian unity is demanded so that the Church can be a more effective sign of God’s Kingdom of love and justice for all humanity. In fact, the Church is the sign and sacrament of the communion in Christ which God wills for the whole of his creation.

Such a vision elicits hope and patient determination, not despair or cynicism. And because such hope is a gift of the Holy Spirit we shall not be disappointed; for “the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think. To him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (*Eph* 3:20–21).

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