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7 November 1974

Address to the General Synod
of the Church of England

The Rt. Rev. Alan C. Clark

Your Graces, My Lords, my Brethren,

I would like to begin these reflections with almost a platitude - that no one ever speaks in a void - though I hasten to add that it is farthest from my thoughts to describe the General Synod as a void ! What I wish to emphasise from the outset of what is for me a very privileged occasion, is that the opportunity to speak to you regarding the work of the Anglican / Roman Catholic Commission is particularly valuable in the light of the extensive interest the two Agreements (on the Eucharist and on the Ministry) have aroused throughout the Church. One finds enormous encouragement in the recent welcome given to them by the two Convocations of York and Canterbury. My contention is, quite simply, that the work of the Commission, particularly as a result of its specific methodology, has changed the face of ecumenical dialogue. In fact, I believe that the whole span of ecumenical activity, which is now contributing towards the growth in Christian Unity, has drawn breath and life from the achievements of ARCIC.

But if one always speaks out of the present moment and to the present moment, it is right to specify in general terms the contemporary context which has made these agreements possible. First and

foremost I would emphasise the ecumenical movement itself. This has thrown into reverse the tragic drift to greater and greater division and to the hopelessness of unyielding polarisation and mutual distrust. This must not be seen as a great human achievement - though great and good men have done much to enable all of us to accept the grace which is being offered - it is a pure gift of God in the Holy Spirit. Why else should those who confess one Lord and one Saviour be converted, within so short a time, to the massive undertaking of seeking a unity that, though never entirely lost, had become submerged in controversy and polemic? The movement of return is under way, a return not to the past but, paradoxically, to a future which Christ, the Lord of the Church, to whom all things are subject, is leading all of us, and which we will disregard to our peril. We cannot ascertain the details of the shape and form of the Church of the future but we are not ignorant of its basic constituents which exist by the express will of Christ. For this Church will be always, at any time in history, the continuing identifiable community of believers, joined by adherence to one apostolic faith, sharing the same sacraments and the same organic life based on the gifts of the Spirit. In whatever way it is incarnated in the passing society of a particular age, it is in visible continuity with its past.

This perhaps is the key to an understanding of how the International Commission made its first stumbling steps to the fashioning of a method whereby, without disregarding the history of our divisions, we could positively profess an unimagined unity of faith in those very areas where reconciliation had appeared for too long to be impossible, namely in the doctrine of the Eucharist, of the Ordained Ministry and of the authority given by Christ to the Church to order all things according to his will. We spoke to each other, not out of our catechisms, but out of our experienced faith, a faith formed by the communities to which we belong. What do you and I believe to be the Eucharist which the Church celebrates in memory of its Lord? What is the Church doing when she gathers the faithful round the altar in this celebration? What is the office and function which is embodied in the ordained ministry of bishop, priest and deacon? By what authority do we say this is the meaning of the

Gospel we are commissioned to preach, and by what criterion do we give absolute value to those doctrines which we consider of the essence of our faith ?

These are the questions which set in motion the interchange of ideas which were to be the stuff out of which our agreements were made. We avoided taking up again, in the same terms, the mechanics of the Reformation debate - not because we underrated the strength of that long, long controversy which, after all, is still with us, but because nothing suggested we would do better than our forebears. Instead, we began by asking what we, as representative of our respective Churches, believed here and now to be Gospel truth. We began by speaking to each other in our own language, of course, but seeking to understand what each was saying - not just the words but the doctrinal positions which these words signalled. Our dialogue was - and remains - an encounter of persons, persons in love with the same Lord and enjoying the love of the same Lord. This means that we did not seek to convince each other of the rightness of our own interpretations but rather, by reflecting together on the sources of the faith we professed, to reach a consensus of faith. It was as though I, as a Roman Catholic, said: this is my faith, to which my Anglican brother replied: it is also mine. Only within this climate of the Spirit is it possible to disentangle the reasons why Christians should adopt with such determination particular doctrinal positions that conflict, rather than unity, becomes inevitable. As Pope John pointed out some ten years ago, speaking out of his generous vision of the redeemed community of our Lord and Saviour, all dialogue begins with a conversion of heart and mind.

Nevertheless, we regarded, and continue to regard, the formulation of our belief as of overriding importance. The faith we profess is a faith to be preached and proclaimed. It needs words to articulate it. Yet it is precisely in the arena of human words and argument that the faith can so easily be distorted. Particular words or expressions become signs of denominational identity, at times even shiboleths. The truth that even within the unity of one faith there can be different expressions of the same faith is not an abstract principle of semantics but the dynamic fact which admits the legitimacy

of a certain pluralism even at the level of faith. This cannot mean that every expression of faith is admissible. There are limits to orthodoxy. But it is evident that much of our doctrinal division requires our close attention in order to be sure that the division results from differing belief rather than from differing theology. We must be able to distinguish what are accretions to our faith, accretions which should be seen for what they are - therefore expendable if need be !

I hope, by now, I have described enough of the spirit and dynamic forces which the work of the Commission released, in order that you may grasp with sympathy not only what we have been endeavouring to do over the last five years but what you, I hope, will be ready to do in your own areas of responsibility. Perhaps this is the moment when it would be right to indicate in more detail the structure of the two agreements, the impetus of their argument and so underline the stringency of their conclusions. I then propose to offer you, in simplicity and with the assurance of your charity, some reflections on the present position and of the practical consequences of the Commission's work.

PART II

The first Agreed Statement was achieved at Windsor in September 1971 at the Third Meeting of the International Commission. It ended (cfr. N.12) with the assertion that substantial agreement had been reached on the doctrine of the Eucharist. The full implications of such an agreement have yet to be registered but in simple terms the Commission was rejecting the assumption that Anglicans and Roman Catholics professed substantially different doctrine in the central mystery of the Christian faith. In the mind of the 'Men of Windsor', it was time to bring to an end the polemic of the Reformation in this area. Nevertheless, though this was not immediately apparent, we were very conscious that we had produced a new kind of credal document - a fact which explains much of the confused reaction that ensued on its publication.

If I may be permitted to quote myself from another context:-

"Agreed Statements are a new kind of ecclesiastical document. They are not agreed by the highest authorities, nor by the Church at large, but by a commission officially sponsored by these authorities. They are formulated in a language acceptable to all members of the commission but not wholly familiar to those more accustomed to the style and vocabulary of their church's 'official' declarations of faith. They seek to provide a deeper examination of the issues that have historically divided our churches and to provide a wider context in which such problems may eventually be resolved.

"They are the first word of doctrinal reconciliation, not the last. They cannot be adequately evaluated in isolation but only as part of an overall programme. Their purpose is to promote the convergence of the churches by establishing unity of faith ...

"We are in process of reconciliation precisely because on the fundamental issues of eucharist, ministry and authority, we are steadily achieving a common understanding. The reconciliation of our churches and their ministries is the goal of our endeavour." (Commentary on Ministry and Ordination: p.3).

But in the face of the bitter polemic of the past regarding the Eucharist, how was this possible? I have already outlined the general methodology of the Commission, and it will, I think, be helpful to put into sharper focus the lines of our argument which imposed our conclusion.

The Agreed Statement expresses:-

- (a) the overall relation of the Eucharist to the Redemption (cfr. N.5):
- (b) the correlation of the Eucharist a c t i o n - a liturgical celebration - with the historical e v e n t of the Death and Resurrection of Christ - expressed through the analogy of memorial or anamnesis (cfr. ibid):
- (c) the meaning of 'sacrifice' when applied to this liturgical, sacramental action. The meaning to be attached to the mystery of Christ acting in the Church as its Head and Priest. This action is so new (for it belongs to the New Dispensation) that older concepts must be very carefully employed if we are to avoid distortion and the unnecessary accusations and counter-accusations that such distortion produces:
- (d) the transformation of the elements into the Body and Blood of Christ (the mystery of the Real Presence) in order that, in sacrament but in reality, these may be eaten and drunk for the growth in eternal life of His Body which is the Church - with the crucial qualification that, though the primary purpose of His Presence in sacrament is for Holy Communion, and demands faith in the communicant in order that this encounter may be fruitful, the coming-to-be of this Presence is not dependent on that personal faith:
- (e) finally - but central - the total mystery is to be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In a true sense our approach was strictly matter-of-fact. We looked at what the Church is doing when she celebrates this mystery, and then endeavoured to discern what central beliefs

control this response to the Lord's command: 'Do this in memory of me'. In this long and searching examination of our apostolic faith, we identified two pivotal truths within the diversity of one truth.

This point is of considerable importance. The Christian faith is one but also multiple. Because it exceeds the power of the human mind to comprehend, it must needs be expressed as a complex of mysteries. But even within each single mystery there is complexity - a hierarchy of truths. One truth will find its authenticity as dependent on a deeper and more central truth. There is, as one of our brilliant French theologians in the Commission perceptively analysed, an axis in Eucharistic faith round which the total mystery revolves. This axis - this pivotal faith - we identified as, first, the sacramental relation of the Church's celebration to the unique sacrificial event of Christ's Death and Resurrection, and, secondly, the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit whereby bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. From these two pivotal doctrines, all else derives. This is not to deny that the derivative doctrines are themselves within the area of faith. For example, the permanence of Christ's presence in the Eucharistic elements is not directly confronted by the document, even though we are convinced that we have established principles whereby this area of non-agreement (not disagreement) may be explored in the fulness of time. Hence our agreement we styled as substantial, not full, suggesting, nevertheless, that, in the light of the above analysis of pivotal faith, our agreement in eucharistic faith is such that "it will no longer constitute an obstacle to the unity we seek" (N.12).

It is very open to my fellow Commissioners to question the emphasis of my presentation. This is not only legitimate, it is inevitable. For the depth of the mystery we contemplate together

ensures that our own limited theological perspectives will be exposed to view. True union, paradoxically, diversifies, particularly since no theological formulation can ever exhaust the content of faith. Hence there can be - there is - a plurality of expression of faith in the fundamental unity of this same faith. Rather than get involved in the morass of the argument regarding the limits of comprehensiveness, I would prefer to quote the sober words of Newman:-

"The deliberate judgment in which the whole Church at length rests and acquiesces, is an infallible prescription and a final sentence against such portions of it as protest and secede." (from the APOLOGIA).

I would like to think that all here will find in the Agreed Statement the makings of 'a deliberate judgment of the whole Church' on its eucharistic faith.

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The Second Agreement of the Commission on MINISTRY AND ORDINATION dated at Canterbury the 5th September 1973, was, somewhat strangely, more easy to achieve, not because the issue was not divisive, but because, once again, we held fast to our brief that factual implications of agreement in doctrine were firmly outside it. It is the Church as a whole which must decide on the factual implications of our, this time, full consensus.

Time does not permit me to describe in detail the massive development in the theology of ministry within the Roman Catholic Church over the last decade, signalled, even as in eucharistic theology, by a considerable number of official documents. This development is paralleled, as I see it, in the mainstream of Anglican thought during the same period. Because of this it was not too difficult for the Commission to find its feet reasonably early in its enquiry.

Because both Churches require apostolicity as a constitutive feature of all ministry and specifically of the ordained ministry, acknowledging together the full emergence of the threefold pattern of ministry at the end of the second century - acknowledging this historical development as according to the will of Christ - it was possible to begin in an area of outstanding agreement. Neither of us can avoid the problem of the New Testament evidence for the authenticity of our ministry, but we are able, in the Statement, to assert that the normative principles of that ministry are contained in the apostolic preaching and have a firm scriptural basis.

Where do we begin ? With Christ, the High Priest, the Minister of the Father, The Church, which is the Body, shares, by its common priesthood, in the priesthood of its Head and is summoned by him into all ministry. The backcloth of any discussion of the ordained ministry is thereby firmly unrolled. The whole Church is in priesthood, the whole Church is in ministry.

The first question to arise, therefore, is to establish the specific role of the ordained minister. The answer is simple: to enable the whole Church to exercise its priesthood of praise, in holiness of life, and its ministry of service, the service of the Gospel. The specific character of the ordained ministry lies in its function of enablement, though it would be to falsify the richness of the gift by reducing it to merely sociological terms. Its historical development illustrates the assertion of the Agreed Statement that the over-arching concept of episcope or 'oversight' binds together the three main features of this ministry. For the ordained minister - and we speak chiefly of the bishop without contradicting our affirmation that the threefold pattern of ministry should be seen as one ministry historically diversified - is in the Church in order to co-ordinate its Spirit-given life, to lead it in the way of the Spirit and to discern or evaluate the objectives the Church as a whole chooses to make its own. In this way, the ordained minister acts as an effective sign of Christ's ministry as Lord of the Church and of the world. At first sight apparently enclosed within the Church, this ministry makes no sense except as an instrument of the Church's mission as the sign of salvation to the world of history and experience.

Many may be recalling the tons of paper expended over the appropriateness of the term 'priesthood' as applied to the ordained ministry. The Commission is at pains to establish that the unique priesthood of Christ, reflected in the common priesthood of the Church, has a particular relationship to the work of the ordained minister - in fact, a 'sacramental relationship' (cfr. N.13) vividly realised in his presidency of the Eucharist. The position of some Reformers that the ordained minister is such exclusively by deputation and assignment of the Christian community is rejected, and his particular charism, in virtue of which he labours in the Church, is firmly placed in a specific gift of the Spirit.

The further question arises: what makes a man an ordained minister, be he bishop, presbyter or deacon? Vocation, by Christ, in and through the Church. What sign or sacramental action gives official embodiment to this vocation? Ordination - never repeated - into the apostolic succession.

It would be inhuman to ask you to avoid the question: does the Agreed Statement assert that both Churches are in the apostolic succession, thereby reversing the Roman Catholic judgment of Apostolicae Curae? But I must ask you to be content with the sober words of our conclusion?

"We consider that our consensus, on questions where agreement is indispensable for unity, offers a positive contribution to the reconciliation of our churches and of their ministries."

This reconciliation we believe to be possible but only when other issues, such as authority and specific questions raised by the notions of infallibility and primacy, have been satisfactorily resolved - for they do admit of resolution if God gives us the courage and the intelligence of the Spirit. For the moment we should direct our attention to the apparently novel - to the Western Christian - approach enshrined in the meeting we attach in the document to the Apostolic Succession.

The Church of God - if one may use this expression without prejudice - is no abstract unity: it is a complex amalgam of communities in

varying degrees of communion one with the other. We are committed, ecumenically, to the pursuit of one communion organically united in legitimate diversity. This organic unity is achieved by the insertion of every Christian Church into the communion of all the Churches in the apostolic tradition. At ordination the bishops of neighbouring churches attest by their action that the new bishop and the church over which he now is called to exercise oversight, lives within the apostolic faith and the bishop's ministry is in historical continuity with the original apostolic ministry (cfr. N16).

It will, I think, be clear that the Statement has ventured to relate the functions of the ordained minister one to the other in such a way that he is no longer seen as primarily a liturgical or cultic figure. Though he possesses, in virtue of his office, a traditional liturgical role, the office entails a wider field of responsibility. As an ordained minister of the Gospel, his prime task is to preach and proclaim that Gospel from within the Christian community whose mission it is to bring every human activity under the lordship of Christ. This work is first and foremost the work of the Spirit of God working in and through the community, but, by Christ's ordinance, it is co-ordinated, promoted and discerned by the Church's ordained ministers. Once this is firmly established it becomes crystal clear that his sacramental role is firmly embedded in his responsibility for oversight. For the Christian community is built up into the Body of Christ by the celebration of the Eucharist over which he is called to preside.

This is in a true sense a work of humble service, but it is a service first and foremost of Christ who has chosen those who exercise it, and none other may do so. Clearly the question of the nature of this authority is overwhelmingly important if we, in the Commission, are to fulfil our goal of consensus in faith. The logic of our dialogue demands the resolution of our differences and disagreements in this difficult area, but we would be poor servants of our Churches if we balked the task we are already in fact pursuing. (The Commission has begun this work and will be meeting again at St. Stephen's, Oxford, next year).

I have said that our goal is consensus in faith. This is the immediate purpose. But there is a deeper and profounder content to what we are doing. For what will emerge at the end of the day, if we respond to the grace of God, is a picture, however imperfectly drawn, of what we profess to be the Church of Christ. This is the fundamental consensus we are seeking. If we have done our work well, then all of us, wherever we are, will have to face the charge: why then do we remain divided.

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PART III

As a very personal coda to the introduction to the work of the Commission and to the Agreed Statements it has produced, I ask the liberty to make some tentative statements about where we now stand and how we should proceed.

I am, of course, overjoyed at the terms of the proposed resolution which will be put, at the proper time, to the Assembly. Agreements reached at Commission level, however official the Commission, will have no value unless they are accepted by the Church at large. But by the nature of the case mere intellectual acceptance of our consensus has a way of being of little avail. No real commitment is involved, no real movement of persons towards one another need take place. It is only when our communities accept that the faith portrayed in our consensus documents is indeed their faith that something dramatic has occurred. This can happen only if our communities - using perhaps the Statements as guide-lines - go through themselves exactly the same process as the members of the Commission. My own experience of hawking these documents up and down the land convinces me not only that we are all still victims of our past - which is inevitable - but that it requires great faith and courage to accept the need to confront our habitual faith and to disentangle its constituent parts with a view to their re-ordering in deeper truth. As the great Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council puts it:-

"There is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down ... As the centuries succeed one another the Church constantly moves towards the fullness of divine truth, until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her."
(Dei Verbum: para. 8).

In the concrete ecumenical situation, however, we suffer a nagging temptation to rush to institutionalise the degree of

agreement we have undoubtedly reached. This is by no means to be rejected. The problem arises when, without care, we urge - to take one example - a degree of sacramental sharing which is not supported by this degree of agreement. It is one thing to ask for greater eucharistic hospitality: it is another to request general intercommunion. A Roman Catholic cannot accept the latter request because he finds therein a basic ambiguity, which does not primarily arise from questions of validity but from the meaning of the Eucharist as a sacrament of faith. In receiving our Holy Communion we attest not only our belief in the presence, in sacrament, of the Body and Blood of the Risen Lord but also in the unity of the Church. If that unity is not yet given, then we are better servants if we accept the pain of our division. This approach, one knows, is unacceptable to many and the deep charity that inspires their longing to share the one bread and the one cup is something one understands. Perhaps it is best to say, at this particular moment, that our way to unity is not only a great grace but that it is also the way of the Cross. Dr. Philip Potter, in his address to the Synod of Bishops in Rome last month, was not afraid to invoke this reality of Christian life. This is the authentic path of Christian reconciliation.

There are, however, so many other ways in which we are reconciled already and with practical results in the field of collaboration and co-operation in the mission of the Church. This has been forced on our unwilling hearts by the emergence of the secular society as a challenge to our shared belief in the Gospel. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Detroit, Cardinal John Francis Dearden, made this valuable comment at the Roman Synod:-

"The emergence of the secular society marks a passage from a Christianity of culture to a Christianity of choice ... Each act of faith is a personal decision which must be reaffirmed in the face of competing interpretations of life. Hence faith, gift of God though it is, also requires continuing education, development and spiritual renewal." (Card. John Francis Dearden, Archbishop of Detroit).

This continuing work must draw on the same resources and, in one way or another, must be shared, not least in prayer.

One great dogmatic fact has steadily dawned on our uncomprehending minds. The Church of God is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. No work for unity, therefore, is viable if it is not at the same time a movement to sanctify the Church, to extend it to all peoples and cultures and to deliver intact the primary apostolic tradition contained in the Scriptures. At once one sees the complexity of what we are trying to do and the extent to which it is a tremendous venture in faith and hope. It is precisely because Christ, the Lord of the Church, is the Son of God that this complex work is possible even within the framework of our divisions. The secular critic is, not unnaturally, unimpressed because of our divided allegiances - for he does not confess the divinity of the Lord of the Church. Not even the obstacle of our divisions can withstand the divine operation of the Spirit to gather all the peoples of the world into the one family of God. The scandals remain: the will of God is done.

I fear I have failed to offer those practical suggestions for our growth in organic unity for which Anglo-Saxons receive merited praise. Others will do this. But, knowing my own inadequacies, I have tried to set a vision before you which is already being realised in front of our eyes if only we open them in faith and in love. We are not seeking a numerical unity as though, by some kind of intellectual process, we will wake up one day to an awareness that from being two, we are now one. No, we are growing together in reconciliation by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is people who are being reconciled. The institutional reconciliation will find its place on the basis of the personal reconciliation.

So much is owed to those who, like His Grace the Archbishop and His Holiness Pope Paul, have nursed and developed this vision in hope. never underestimating the human obstacles but undeterred

by our stupidities. It is a time to be merciful to one another and to renew our commitment. May I end these reflections, which you have heard so patiently, with the great words of St. Paul:-

"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love." (Ephes. 4: 15ff).