

Malta Ten Years Later*

It is exactly ten years since the writing of the *Malta Report*, dated 2 January 1968, which concluded the labours of the Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission.¹ The Commission had been established as the immediate consequence of the historic meeting of Pope Paul and Archbishop Ramsey in Rome, March 1966, just three months after the close of the second Vatican Council. In the 'Common Declaration' which they then issued from St Paul without-the-walls they stated their intention 'to inaugurate between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion a serious dialogue which, founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions, may lead to that unity in truth, for which Christ prayed'.

In response to this Declaration a joint commission was set up with commendable speed. It first met at Gazzada in January 1967; this was followed by a second meeting at Huntercombe the following September and a final session at Malta over the New Year. Never perhaps did a commission of this sort work so promptly or indeed so creatively to produce in very little time a remarkably imaginative report. Indeed when one recalls the very little time given to it (only three days at Malta, although a longer meeting had been planned) and the threat of the guillotine hanging over the commission, the production of the report might seem little less than miraculous. If there are certain obscurities to be found within it, this may rightly be ascribed to an acute shortage of time in which to sit back and consider it. Essentially the ecumenical vision and strategy of Malta still seem to me, ten years later, unrivalled and I think it is definitely worthwhile to reconsider that strategy today, particularly within the context of the present situation arrived at across three reports of the later Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). I write as one who was a member of the Preparatory Commission and also of the drafting committee appointed at Malta to produce its final report (together with Bishop Knapp-Fisher, Dr Massey Shepherd and Father George Tavard), but as one who has had no connection with the subsequent commission. It may be noted in passing that the continuity between the commissions was very considerable upon the Anglican side but rather slight upon the Catholic.

The position of the *Malta Report* was, of course, that of seeking

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1. *Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogue, The Work of the Preparatory Commission*, ed. Alan Clark and Colin Davey, Oxford University Press, 1974.

'the full, organic unity of our two communions'. While the institutional shape such unity would take was, and is, far from clear, there could be no other goal. The question—and it was seen as essentially a practical question—was, how to get there? While doctrinal differences and the necessity for some sufficient doctrinal unity were recognized as extremely important, there was a very strong sense in the Preparatory Commission that the true road to unity could not be merely, or even chiefly, the road of doctrinal and theological agreement. The separation and reunion of large Christian bodies is a sociological phenomenon and must be approached as such. The Preparatory Commission was not just a body of theologians. There were five bishops upon each side and we understood our role as essentially theologico-practical. A considerable part of the commission's time, as of its recommendations, was taken up with the practical field. We were convinced that this was vitally important and that, indeed, doctrinal agreement could only grow out of a far greater sharing in prayer and work than had hitherto been achieved. When the *Malta Report* recommended the establishment of a 'Permanent Joint Commission' it was not intended as merely a theological workgroup, nor as merely a practical organ of cooperation, but as something which would continue to hold together both sides and certainly in some way 'monitor' the implementation of all aspects of the Report.

It is worth recalling here some of the more practical recommendations of Section II of the Report:

8. In every region where each Communion has a hierarchy, we propose an annual joint meeting of either the whole or some considerable representation of the two hierarchies.

9. In the same circumstances we further recommend:

(a) Constant consultation between committees concerned with pastoral and evangelistic problems including, where appropriate, the appointment of joint committees.

(b) Agreements for joint use of churches and other ecclesiastical buildings, both existing and to be built, wherever such use is helpful for one or other of the two Communions.

(c) Agreements to share facilities for theological education, with the hope that all future priests of each Communion should have attended some course taught by a professor of the other Communion. Arrangements should also be made where possible for temporary exchange of students.

While something has been done on these lines in the last ten years, in general one must say that it has not been very much; yet no body—least of all the International Commission—has ever taken

these matters up again.

Nevertheless this side of the Preparatory Commission's work, while undoubtedly important, remained subsidiary to its total strategy. Far more original was the attempt to plot a wider road (on which, of course, these recommendations would constitute some of the earlier paces) of 'unity by stages'. We sensed, I think, that it was a chimera to imagine one could pass almost at a stroke from profound disassociation to full communion when the theologians and the highest ecclesiastical authority had settled upon formulas of doctrinal agreement, and that the way forward must lie in a relationship developing across a number of stages, of which the most significant might be something a good deal less than full communion (dependent upon full doctrinal agreement) but a good deal more than the proposals of section II. The most important thing in the report was then that part of section III which discussed the possibility of 'some measure of sacramental intercommunion apart from full visible unity'. It was, I am sure, a very remarkable thing that a commission of such weight in 1967 could speak at all about intercommunion. Certainly the mind of the members was not one upon this subject; indeed each delegation was fairly sharply divided within itself. While one or two members undoubtedly desired a statement of commitment to shared communion, one or two others were at first opposed to any mention of the subject at all. Yet the issue had been very seriously raised already at Huntercombe; it was discussed in the subsequent papers of Bishops McAdoo and Butler. It was then in no way a last minute insertion. After considerable debate at Malta it was agreed that the Report could not be silent about it. It was far too important for that.

The relevant passage (paragraph 18) is as follows:

The fulfilment of our aim is far from imminent. In these circumstances the question of accepting some measure of sacramental intercommunion apart from full visible unity is being raised on every side. In the minds of many Christians no issue is today more urgent. We cannot ignore this, but equally we cannot sanction changes touching the very heart of Church life, eucharistic communion, without being certain that such changes would be truly Christian. Such certainty cannot be reached without more and careful study of the theology implied.

As I see it the *Malta Report* here placed the issue of some fairly considerable sharing of eucharistic communion between Roman Catholics and Anglicans, prior to full doctrinal unity, squarely on the table as a matter of urgency. It declared that the Commission could not at this stage recommend such sharing without a greater sense of

certainty as to what was involved, and it added that to attain this certainty more study was needed. At the time we could go no further, particularly as there was a very wide range of attitudes to the question upon both sides (with a rather surprisingly strong anti-intercommunion group on the Anglican side) and no more time for exploration. What was important was that the Commission got so far as it did, and that it clearly distinguished this issue as one at least possibly resolvable apart from, and well prior to, that of full unity.

It had, of course, been clear to the Commission already at Huntercombe that sharing in communion could hardly be recommended apart from a mutual recognition of ministry and hence the question of Anglican Orders at once arose. Should it be reconsidered or should it not? There were, I recollect, some quite heated exchanges over this at Huntercombe, but it had finally been accepted there that the Commission should itself consider whether a reconsideration of the Anglican Orders question was desirable and, if so, how it should be done. Two members were invited to prepare additional papers on this for Malta. These papers and the discussion around them as first hinged upon the bull *Apostolicae Curae*, its authority and argumentation. Could *Apostolicae Curae* be re-examined? When the matter was taken up again at Malta, there seemed to have been considerable progress at this point. First, there was general agreement that it would be profitable, even necessary, to reconsider the Roman judgement on Anglican Orders; secondly, this should be done jointly; thirdly, it should be done within a wider context of agreement about the basic doctrine of the ministry and the Eucharist; fourthly, so far as possible, it should avoid the impression of being a reassessment of *Apostolicae Curae* as such. The full text of the Report on this (paragraph 19) is as follows:

We are agreed that among the conditions required for intercommunion are both a true sharing in faith and the mutual recognition of ministry. The latter presents a particular difficulty in regard to Anglican Orders according to the traditional judgement of the Roman Church. We believe that the present growing together of our two Communion and the needs of the future require of us a very serious consideration of this question in the light of modern theology. The theology of the ministry forms part of the theology of the Church and must be considered as such. It is only when sufficient agreement has been reached as to the nature of the priesthood and the meaning to be attached in this context to the word 'validity' that we could proceed, working always jointly, to the application of this doctrine to the Anglican ministry today. We would wish to re-

examine historical events and past documents only to the extent that they can throw light upon the facts of the present situation. This paragraph is remarkable in that it does recommend 'a very serious consideration' undertaken jointly of the 'validity' of Anglican Orders. The recommendation makes sense in the immediately preceding paragraph about intercommunion. Only when the thought of these two paragraphs is clearly understood can one make sense of the very important recommendation of paragraph 22 that the 'Permanent Commission' should have two sub-commissions:

'ONE to examine the question of intercommunion, and the related matters of Church and Ministry;

THE OTHER to examine the question of authority, its nature, exercise, and implications'.

The reason for the duality was precisely in order to distinguish a complex of theological issues relating to 'some measure of sacramental intercommunion' from a further complex relating chiefly to authority, upon which must rest 'full, organic unity'. We were well aware of the extreme unlikelihood of arriving within a few years at agreement over the latter, but we wanted at the very least to leave the doors open to arriving at the former. Some certainly felt reasonably confident that there was already existent an adequate unity of belief between Anglicans and Roman Catholics over Eucharist and Ministry and that this—if combined with Catholic recognition upon one ground or another of Anglican ministry *in concerto*—could be sufficient to the establishment of rather open communion, itself a requisite step towards the achievement of the final goal. But there we had to leave it.

The recommendations of the *Malta Report* had been unanimous—no mean achievement when one remembers some of the very sharp discussion and the extremely wide range of the Commission's membership. This, however, was not to prove sufficient protection. Even though Bishop Willebrands had been a full member of the commission and Canon Purdy its secretary, the Report raised misgivings in Rome whose exact nature has never been revealed. Cardinal Bea only wrote later to the Archbishop of Canterbury (10 June 1968) that 'in some of its phrases, the formulation seems not quite clear and exact'. Permission to publish was, therefore, refused and though the Report was circulated to the members of the Lambeth Conference that summer, it was only leaked to the press the following November and so lost some of its possible impact. It was sad that such an extremely positive and imaginative document deriving from a most responsible and carefully selected body of bishops and theologians should have been so treated.

Following upon this there was a fairly long delay before the 'Permanent Commission' (rechristened the 'Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission') was appointed. It first met in January 1970 just two years after Malta. In the following years important statements of consensus have been produced upon the Eucharist (1971), the Ministry (1973), and 'Authority in the Church' (1976); they have all been published promptly and it would be hard to feel other than very grateful for the impressive amount of work that has been done and the considerable measure of agreement revealed. These statements, as the final paragraph of the third confirms, were seen as a response to the programme proposed by the Preparatory Commission and it is therefore proper to ask now whether they have in fact been so, and what differences one may detect between the approaches of the two commissions.

A first contrast in structure is, I think, fairly clear, at least upon the Catholic side. The Preparatory Commission included five bishops as members, the International Commission has had but two, both auxiliaries and both English. In the International Commission Bishop Clark has been the Catholic chairman while Bishop Butler's appointment can be reasonably regarded as that of a theologian rather than as that of a bishop. The difference is clear. The status of the Commission was being down graded. Essentially this was not to be a joint commission of bishops and theologians, but a joint commission of theologians with episcopal chairmen: the genus of the animal was altered and at a time when, with the gap of time since the ending of the Council growing, the status of the theologian within the Catholic Church was also in some decline. This was, however, a somewhat anomalous arrangement and one presumably undiscussed because upon the Anglican side the number of bishops was in no way diminished.

Following upon this one notices an apparently firm withdrawal from any consideration of the practical drawing together of the two communions—the concerns of the International Commission have, so far as one can judge, been purely theological. This might not have mattered so much if some other body had been entrusted with the task of carrying on the other half of the Preparatory Commission's task, but this was not the case. Hence the subtle structure devised at Malta of a Permanent Commission with two theological sub-commissions, one to concern itself with an intercommunion stage, the other with the longer term 'full, organic unity', was swept aside and with it, one senses, much of the underlying strategy it represented. It is not surprising then that the issue of intercommunion, as a decisively important moral challenge facing our two Churches, seems

never to have been faced up to by the Commission at all; hence the vital desirability of discussing not just 'ministry' in general but our two ministries in particular (and therefore Anglican Orders) also faded away. The impression given is that ten years later these questions have never seriously been followed up; the option instead has been towards a generality which has increasingly led to unreality.

In this context I find it a little strange that Dr Henry Chadwick should take Bishop Montefiore to task² for suggesting shared communion while the Roman judgement upon Anglican Orders has not been revised. Dr Chadwick has, after all, been a leading member for eight years of a commission which was asked by its predecessor to consider just this and yet has never, apparently, even begun to tackle the issue as such. Yet while it is not done the case against any but emergency sharing in eucharistic communion can seem very strong. It seems to me seriously wrong that the old unfavourable judgement upon Anglican Orders should be used by some upon both sides as a bar to growth in the sharing of communion at the same time as a joint reconsideration of the hard particularities involved in that judgement is consistently blocked.

This may sound hard but it is certainly not intended to discount the value of the work of the International Commission as a whole. On the contrary. Its first two reports, on the Eucharist and the Ministry, fully responded to one side of the Malta programme. It would be difficult to fault them on any major point. They were essentially theologico-practical. They asserted the existence of a genuine consensus between the two communions, and few bishops or theologians would want, I think, to challenge the substantial reality of that consensus. This was extremely important in itself and important too in edging forward towards that major new stage of 'partial communion' which could include a measure of eucharistic sharing. It was certainly an important part of the programme which the *Malta Report* had in mind. What is unfortunate is that these two documents were not followed, as had been proposed, by 'the application of this doctrine to the Anglican ministry of today' which could have been the final step prior to attaining the certainty that 'some measure of sacramental intercommunion' is acceptable.

The Commission turned instead to tackle the central issue of ecclesiastical authority and it was at this point that the strategy of Malta was, in my opinion, effectively abandoned. The *Malta Report* had, of course, asked for an examination of 'the nature of authority'

2. Henry Chadwick, 'A Brief Apology for "Authority in the Church" (Venice 1976)', *Theology*, September 1977, p. 325.

and it had certainly presumed that the two examinations would to some extent be concurrent. Moreover no question is finally more crucial. Nevertheless at this point to abandon the one task as apparently complete without in fact examining further either intercommunion or Anglican Orders and so pass to the other, was in fact to imply a very different strategy, one in which things are expected to remain much as they are now until full doctrinal consensus is obtained right across the board, out of which, presumably, could come some form or another of 'full organic unity'.

The criticism of this course of action is that it is profoundly unrealistic to hope for such a consensus being obtained between our two communions in the foreseeable future. The defence must be, either that there is no alternative or that the criticism itself is too pessimistic and that such a consensus is, with some probability, obtainable so soon that the Malta half-way house is not worth pausing at. The former argument (that there is no alternative) would be an assertion that doctrinally a stage of 'partial communion' which includes 'some measure of sacramental intercommunion' is completely unacceptable to one or other side. It would seem to me that the Commission had no business to take up such a position without first very seriously investigating it and then publishing its conclusions because conclusions of this kind coming from ARCIC would clearly be very significant indeed and deserve pondering by all concerned. As this has not been done, I presume that it is not the case. On the contrary ARCIC clearly believed that a far larger measure of consensus was obtainable and in its third statement, that on Authority, it claimed to have reached it, or very nearly reached it. It has arrived at what 'amounts to a consensus on authority in the Church and, in particular, on the basic principles of primacy' (par. 24). All that there is left to do is to pass from these 'basic principles' to settle some 'particular claims of papal primacy and its exercise'. To have managed anything like this would indeed be a very remarkable achievement—something vastly beyond that of the first two agreed statements. If the claim be valid it could surely justify the abandonment of what might now be described as the relatively cautious approach of Malta for a splendid *coup d'église*, a taking of the ecumenical jackpot.

Personally however I remain entirely unable to rise to any enthusiasm about the third agreed statement. It appears instead a profoundly unsatisfactory document. Essentially there was, and is, a recognizable consensus within the two communions (and not just within the two sides of ARCIC) in regard to the Eucharist and the ministry and the Commission had only to confirm and articulate this,

but sad as it may be to admit, there is no such consensus nor near to being one in the far more difficult and complex area of authority. If there be a consensus within the Commission and the statement is recognizing that consensus, then it can only be that the Commission has gone its own way, becoming quite unrepresentative of the two Churches. As a matter of fact there is not today a consensus within either of the two Churches in this area, let alone between them, and a statement of this sort cannot provide what does not exist. As a consequence it simply does not ring true, appearing instead—to put it unkindly—as a bad amalgam of Anglican woolliness and Roman double talk. Personally I do not find my own beliefs adequately reflected here and still less those of the great majority of Catholic bishops and theologians, but nor do I find those of all—or perhaps most—Anglicans (The comments of Professor Lampe in *Theology*, September 1977, pp. 362-5 are very relevant here). At point after point vague phrases like 'generally thought', 'modern Roman Catholic theology' and such like cover up hard problems. The basic trouble is the level of generality at which the document remains. Between any two groups one can find some level of generality at which vital differences will no longer stick out. An essential methodological point facing the establishment of any agreement is how far, for the matter involved, one can properly withdraw from particulars. It is my conviction that the Commission chose a level at which, from the viewpoint of theologico-practical dialogue, agreement might well be found but only at the cost of a basic unreality. The decisiveness of particularity within incarnational religion and ecclesiastical tradition is such that a document which limits itself to such 'basic principles' may simply miss the mark.

To take two small examples where many might be given. The first is indeed one of the vitally decisive points: 'When the Church meets in ecumenical council its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous' (par 19). It seems quite certain that most Anglicans, at least very many Anglicans, would not accept that this is necessarily so, however 'ecumenical council' be defined. And almost no Anglican would accept Trent or Vatican I as ecumenical, yet for almost all Roman Catholics these two extremely important councils are quite certainly ecumenical. It is sheer double talk to offer such a statement when the particulars behind it will be understood so differently. The lack of consensus goes far beyond 'the particular claims of papal primacy' and it is disingenuous and unhelpful to cover this up.

A second small example, from a rather different field, relates not to the statement as such but to its defence by Dr Chadwick and Father

Yarnold. They have written that 'the exercise of the Pope's immediate jurisdiction outside Rome is extremely rare, even rarer, perhaps, than the exercise of his infallible teaching authority'.³ This assertion was presumably meant to suggest that the Roman claim to immediate jurisdiction has been much misinterpreted and, properly understood, should not be hard to swallow. But is it true? Is not the appointment of every bishop of the Latin rite throughout the world an example today of the pope's immediate jurisdiction, and is that rare or unimportant? Examples of this sort in the whole exercise could be multiplied, but these two are quite enough to indicate that there is a profound unreality in what the International Commission has produced. It was perfectly possible for the Roman Catholic Church, as it now is, to accept the first two agreed statements and much could follow from that. It is quite impossible to imagine the Roman Catholic Church, as it now is, accepting the third statement—and it is very hard to imagine Anglicans doing so either. The tragedy may be that the third statement will prove to have subtly devalued its predecessors, so that all three will now remain little more than interesting theological documents, while the trail of Malta is sadly lost.

Between Rome and Constantinople there is also no consensus about ecclesiastical authority and at present it is unlikely that there will be one. The Greek Orthodox Church cannot accept Trent or Vatican I either. Nevertheless Pope Paul has declared that between these two Churches there exists an 'almost full communion'. It is that 'almost full communion' as a more than half-way house to 'full organic unity' which the *Malta Report*, it seems to me, was trying so hard to steer towards through the articulation of a strategy at once courageous, imaginative and practicable. Somehow we must return to the scent and Archbishop Coggan, in his recent visit to Rome, was doing his best to get us there: 'Has not the time now arrived when we have reached such a measure of agreement on so many of the fundamentals of the Gospel that a relationship of shared communion can be encouraged by the leadership of both our Churches?'

'I would go further and ask whether our work of joint evangelization will not be seriously weakened until we are able to go to that work strengthened by our joint participation in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood?'

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3. *Truth and Authority*, E. J. Yarnold S.J., Henry Chadwick, CTS/SPCK, 1977, p. 34.

4. *The Times*, 29 April, 1977. For my own position see 'Is there room today for reciprocal intercommunion between Anglicans and Catholics', *One in Christ*, October 1973, pp. 337-53, a paper reprinted in *The Faces of God*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1975, pp. 95-112.