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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2ND 1970

ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION: VENICE 1970

The Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission, appointed by Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, met for the second time from September 21st to 28th in Venice. The Co-Chairmen were the Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Northampton (the Rt. Revd. Alan Clark) and the Anglican Bishop of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin (the Rt. Revd. H.R. McAdoo).

Papers prepared by Sub-Commissions since the first meeting of the Commission at Windsor in January this year, were presented and revised at Venice. In the revised form they were again submitted to the Commission and were debated in detail. It is hoped that they may be published, not as a report of the whole Commission but to indicate the Commission's present thinking.

The work of the Commission at Venice was divided under three headings. Consideration was given to the exercise of Authority in the Church, to the Eucharist, and to Ministry. It was reiterated that the ultimate goal was the organic union of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, and that the task of the Commission was to suggest lines of convergence, particularly in these three areas.

One document submitted to the Commission analysed the Roman Catholic and Anglican doctrines of the Church and of Authority, tracing convergences among the agreements and disagreements. The Roman Catholic view prior to Vatican II that the one Church of Christ was exclusively co-extensive with the Roman Catholic Church was seen as no longer defensible. Even though it is claimed that the essential elements of Christ's Church are to be found in the Roman Catholic Church, the existence of these elements, in some form,

must be recognised in other Christian Churches. Anglicans, as indicated by the Lambeth Conference of 1968, are not willing to accept the 1870 definition of papal infallibility as hitherto expounded. But a view was advanced that the Anglican ideal of diversity within unity (comprehension) might well be safeguarded, in an age of theological pluralism, if, in a united Church there were a focus of unity and final authority. This was not taken as implying that such an authority was infallible, since Anglicans hold that what was given to the Church was not infallibility but the Holy Spirit.

The Sub-Commission on Eucharist recognised that Communion, as the heart of the Eucharist, must necessarily be incomplete until full participation in it is possible for all. There was no attempt to evade the real theological differences which still make this impossible. It was however recognised that there are some Anglicans and Roman Catholics who are impatient with any such restriction. What was of paramount importance was the startling convergence and frequent identity of doctrine regarding Eucharistic faith and practice.

The Sub-Commission on Ministry found the two Churches to share a deep understanding of Christian ministry in the life of the Church, while being aware both of the historical problems of early ministry and of the pastoral problems of contemporary ministry. It agreed that the present situation is new - so much so that pastoral needs demand an immediate searching examination of such traditional differences as those concerning the relation of the episcopate to papal ministry, Roman primacy, infallible magisterium and universal jurisdiction. This examination must however not look backward at history for its own sake but at the present

pastoral situation, where the quest for unity is an integral part of ministry. The problem of orders must be looked at in the same way, facing squarely the question whether the new situation calls for a new policy in the Roman Catholic Church. This policy would include a careful determination of the arguments behind the Bull "Apostolicae Curae" and a candid judgement whether development of doctrine has superseded the theological assumptions of 1896.

The Commission was grateful for the presence of three expert consultants in the study of moral theology, who contributed papers to which preliminary consideration was given. This centred on the personal element in moral decisions, and divergence of opinion was apparent in the part played by authority.

The next meeting of the Commission is planned for September 1971. It is proposed that this meeting should be primarily devoted to considering the Eucharist as a possible way and means to the drawing together of the two Churches. Before that, Sub-Commissions will continue to work locally. Attention will be given to local ecumenical developments in different parts of the world and to reaction to any work of the Commission which may be published.