

Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission;Papal Audience. 4th September, 1980Pope John Paul II's Welcome

Dear Brothers in Christ,
You are most welcome here.

I greet you with honour, veterans, seasoned workers in a great cause — that unity for which Christ prayed so solemnly on the eve of his sacrificial death.

We know that this cause is the responsibility of all who are committed to Christ (cf. Unitatis Redintegratio, 5). It can be served in many ways; the way assigned to you by the Common Declaration of Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey was that of « serious theological dialogue based on the Scriptures and on the ancient common Tradition ». You see that the very words of this programme are revealing. Unity is a gift of our Lord and Saviour, the founder of the Church. Although it was marred by the sin of men, it was never entirely lost. We have a common treasure, which we must recover and in the fullness of which we must share, not losing certain characteristic qualities and gifts which have been ours even in our divided state.

Your method has been to go behind the habit of thought and expression born and nourished in enmity and controversy, to scrutinize together the great common treasure, to clothe it in a language at once traditional and expressive of the insights of an age which no longer glories in strife but seeks to come together in listening to the quiet voice of the Spirit.

I do not need to tell you — you can tell me — that the task is not easy. It is not a task for man unaided. In seeking unity, man must first imitate Christ in praying for it. You have grasped and practised this, praying together; and you have reflected together, sharing in each other's liturgies and offices so far as is proper to our still divided state. This support was put behind your work of study, reflection and formulation from the beginning, fourteen years ago. You have prayed and countless others have prayed with you and for you.

Now your appointed task draws to an end. No doubt you look back in love and brotherhood on those years of labour. Some of its fruits are well known, have been studied by many others, have influenced many. Now the time is approaching when you will make a final report, which the respective ecclesiastical authorities must assess.

Here is a great responsibility. Your work will be taken seriously — weighed with all the care and sympathetic attention it demands. I thank God for what has been achieved, and I thank you, who have worked in his Name, with a desire to be submissive to his Spirit.

As the two men who commissioned you realized deeply, oneness in faith lies at the roots and fertilizes Christian life. Given that, there can be rich variety in growth. In three great fields of doctrine you have sought agreement in those matters in which doctrine admits no diversity. This effort calls for warm appreciation.

But you yourself realize that much remains to be done. To understand the mystery of Christ's Church, the Sacrament of Salvation, in its fullness is an abiding challenge. Many of the practical problems which still face us (questions of order, of mixed marriages, of shared sacramental life, of Christian morality) can only move towards solution as our understanding of that mystery deepens.

But here and now we must think with gratitude of what you have done. Your work and its fruits are already in themselves manifestations of, and a contribution to that « greater common witness » of which Paul VI spoke in Evangelii Nuntiandi (no. 77) and it is an enabling instrument for all Christians who increasingly feel the call to common witness. It is a reminder that such witness is no matter of sentiment, but must be the fruit of prayer and hard work, of honesty and willingness to speak the truth in love.

With gladness I bless and thank you all. I pledge my concern for your work and my support for those who may continue it, and I join you in praying that the « Father of lights, in whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. » (James 1:17) may shed his light on us as we seek untiringly to reach full unity in his Son Jesus Christ.