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CHURCH INFORMATION OFFICE | CATHOLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

**CHURCH HOUSE, DEAN'S YARD,
LONDON SW1P 3NZ.**

TELEPHONE 01-222 9011

**ST. VINCENT'S, CARLISLE PLACE,
LONDON SW1P 1NL.**

TELEPHONE 01-828 2231/2

STATEMENT BY THE ANGLICAN CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE ANGLICAN/
ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION - THE MOST
REVD. HENRY McADOO, ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN

CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION

Four centuries of separation between Christians, often involving hostility, is a long and tragic division of those who are brothers by virtue of their baptism. The reasons for this separation are complex but are known in outline to most people. But Christ prayed that his People might be one, and the question is, What are his People doing about it?

The ecumenical movement is the answer in general and a specific answer to the question, what is being done about the separation between Anglicans and Roman Catholics? is contained in the Final Report of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission which is now in your hands.

It is not my intention to summarise the story of this Commission. The names of its members and the account of its meetings and the development of its work are all before you in the Final Report. Suffice it to say that it all stemmed from the meeting of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey, the one hundredth Archbishop of Canterbury, in Rome during March 1966. They issued a Common Declaration

(incidentally, a first ever) in which they called the Christians of both obediences "to a new stage in the development of fraternal relations, based on Christian charity, and of sincere efforts to remove the causes of conflict and to re-establish unity". To that end, they announced that "They intend 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."

THE MALTA REPORT

That "serious dialogue" and that quest for "unity in truth" began with the setting up of the Joint Preparatory Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission which reported to the Pope and the Archbishop in January 1968 - the Malta Report. This report asked for the setting up of a new Commission, but first it said three very important things. These bear directly on today's crucial question: what is ARCIC's contribution to the problem of bringing closer together these two separated Churches?

The three very important things which the Malta Report said are:

1. There is a large area of full agreement in faith and doctrine as between the two Churches.
2. There are three areas in particular which need examining since they have been and are areas of

disagreement. These are eucharist, ministry and authority in the Church.

3. The report stressed the concept of unity by stages.

This brings me straight to today's business, the publication of ARCIC's Final Report.

In a nutshell, the Commission has addressed itself to these three problem areas and its findings may be seen in the Agreed Statements on Eucharistic Doctrine, on Ministry in the Church, and in the two agreed statements on Authority in the Church. The second of these, Authority II, with the Authority Elucidation (Final Report, pp 68-98) is new material, first published today, and I shall say something about it in a moment. The other three Agreed Statements have already been in people's hands for some years and have been widely discussed and have received the approval of a number of Anglican General Synods.

AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS

Let me draw the picture then in terms of a balance sheet. On the credit side, what have we got as a result of the work of the two Commissions? First, we have the area of full agreement as set out in the Malta Report (3), (7) (Final Report, p. 109 and pp. 110-11). Second, we have the area of substantial agreement on eucharist and on ministry, as set out in the Windsor and Canterbury Statements respectively.

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Third, in the two Statements on Authority, we have an area of full agreement that the purpose of authority is to maintain the Church in the truth of the Gospel. We agreed on this and achieved a consensus on "the basic principles of primacy". (Authority I, 24) In our Elucidation on authority, now published in this Final Report, we noted that "Anglicanism has never rejected the principle and practice of primacy" and we indicate how the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury in connection with the Lambeth Conference and provincial General Synods "illustrates a particular relationship between conciliarity and primacy in the Anglican Communion." (Final Report, p. 77). The universal primacy which we visualise for a united Church is one in which the "general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of episcopate" will be clearly realised.

In the preface to Authority I, we pointed out that "it was precisely in the problem of papal primacy that our historical divisions found their unhappy origin" and we there underlined "the distinction between the ideal and the actual which is important for the reading of our document and for the understanding of the method we have used." We have again stressed this in the preface to the Final Report. In other words, we are not talking about a universal primacy as it now is in its purely Roman Catholic context but as it should be in the context of a united Church. We are talking about a situation in which primacy and conciliarity are complementary, and this is a central theme in Authority I.

It must be, in the words of the new Elucidation, a "universal primacy which does not inhibit conciliarity."

This is the necessary background to what both Authority Statements reveal about an area of divergence between our two Churches as to how authority in the Church maintains the Church in the truth of the Gospel. How is this service of preserving the Church from error performed? (One may refer here to Authority II, pp. 28-33). This question is answered for Roman Catholics by the doctrine of papal infallibility - if one may use shorthand and over-simplified language.

Anglicans, on the other hand, regard the conciliar and synodal process as the instrumentality by which, through the appeal to Scripture, tradition and reason, the Church is maintained in the truth by the Spirit. They hold that their Church has demonstrably been so maintained without the agency of a teaching office claiming such a charism of infallibility. (see Authority II para.31, p.97).

"The Anglican tradition" so wrote Yarnold and Chadwick "has regarded this Roman Catholic doctrine of authority in the Church as one-sided and as needing to be qualified by (a) appeal to the sources of apostolic faith and life in the scriptures, (b) the ancient catholic tradition, especially as enshrined in the decisions of the ecumenical councils of the undivided Church, (c) reason. Accordingly the Anglican tradition has seen the problem of authority in the Church in terms of a need to preserve a balance between several elements, and has therefore felt that a true and proper understanding of truth and teaching authority in the Church is unlikely

to be found centred upon one particular bishop, whose judgement can at times be coloured by his background and national culture and who, because of this concentration of authority in a single person, can escape the checks and balances provided by other norms of authority." (1)

This concept of a multiple and dispersed authority was set out in the deliberations of the Lambeth Conference of 1948. (2) The exercise of this "teaching authority by the bishop of Rome, independent of a Council, is not recommended (for many Anglicans) by the fact that through it these Marian doctrines were proclaimed as dogmas binding on all the faithful." (Authority II, 30).

Thus, Authority II (31) records that "In spite of our agreement over the need of a universal primacy in a united Church, Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgement necessarily attached to the office of the bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be known to be wholly assured before their reception by the faithful."

Given this specific disagreement on infallibility, ARCIC concluded that "We have already been able to agree that conciliarity and primacy are complementary (Authority I, paras 22-23). We can now together affirm that the Church needs both a multiple, dispersed authority, with which all God's people are actively involved, and also a universal primate as servant and focus of visible unity in truth and love.

This does not mean that all differences have been eliminated; but if any Petrine function and office are exercised in the living Church of which a universal primate is called to serve as a visible focus, then it inheres in his office that he should have both a defined teaching responsibility and appropriate gifts of the Spirit to enable him to discharge it. The Commission also observed that contemporary discussions of conciliarity and primacy in both communions indicate that we are not dealing with positions destined to remain static". Significantly (and I shall refer to this in my concluding remarks) the Commission added "We suggest that some difficulties will not be wholly resolved until a practical initiative has been taken and our two Communions have lived together more visibly in the one koinonia". (Final Report, 33).

HOW CAN RECONCILIATION BEGIN?

This brings me by way of conclusion to the balance sheet and to the third important point in the Malta Report, namely, unity by stages.

The debit side reveals disagreement on the affirmation that "the pope can be infallible in his teaching", special difficulties being created for Anglicans by the recent Marian dogmas, because Anglicans doubt the appropriateness, or even the possibility, of defining them as essential to the faith of believers (Authority I, 24(c)).

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The question then is whether, when set over against the areas of full and substantial agreement, this is sufficient to preclude the possibility of a new relationship being officially established between the Churches? (One naturally thinks of the relations between the Orthodox and Roman Churches approved by the Second Vatican Council. The former do not accept the 1870 Decree on Papal infallibility.)

Is not this where the Malta Report's concept of unity by stages may well provide the only live option? It is the concept of growing into unity by stages, each of which is commensurate with the degree of agreement achieved. ARCIC has referred to this on several occasions. For example, in the Co-Chairmen's preface to Authority I we find: "We are convinced, therefore, that our degree of agreement, which argues for greater communion between our Churches, can make a profound contribution to the witness of Christianity in our contemporary society."

The concluding paragraph (26) of the same Statement is perhaps the fullest expression of this conviction: "The Malta Report of 1968 envisaged the coming together of the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion in terms of 'unity by stages.' We have reached agreements on the doctrines of the Eucharist, Ministry, and, apart from the qualifications of paragraph 24, Authority. Doctrinal agreements reached by theological commissions cannot, however, by themselves achieve the goal of Christian unity. Accordingly, we submit our Statements to our respective authorities to consider whether or not they are judged to express on these central subjects a unity at the

level of faith which not only justifies but requires action to bring about a closer sharing between our two communions in life, worship and mission."

Now, in our Final Report, the Commission states (Conclusion, p.99) that "the convergence reflected in our Statements would appear to call for the establishing of a new relationship between our Churches as a next stage in the journey towards Christian unity." The concluding words of the Report are the Commission's final bow: "There are high expectations that significant initiatives will be boldly undertaken to deepen our reconciliation."

In many parts of the world Anglicans and Roman Catholics despite these differences are even now a reconciled community and the next stage must surely be for the Churches to decide, and to see what kind of changed inter-Church relationship fits a new and unprecedented situation. Accordingly, ARCIC now asks the Churches two questions:

1. Whether the Agreed Statements and Elucidations are consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans/Roman Catholics?
2. Whether the Final Report offers a sufficient basis for taking the next concrete step towards the reconciliation of our Churches grounded in agreement in faith?

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It requested that a new Commission, working on the basis of the Final Report, should work out the implications of such reconciliation, should our two Churches respond favourably to the questions posed. It would thus begin at once to unpack the idea of unity by stages while the Churches, through their appropriate authorities, were deliberating on the questions. ARCIC hopes that its work may yet prove to be the beginning of reconciliation. In 1977, the then Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope Paul in their Common Declaration (9) noted "Many in both communions are asking themselves whether they have a common faith sufficient to be translated into communion of life, worship and mission. Only the communions themselves through their pastoral authorities can give that answer. When the moment comes to do so, may the answer shine through in spirit and in truth, not obscured by the enmities, the prejudices and the suspicions of the past."

Footnotes:

- (1) Truth and Authority (1977) by E.J. Yarnold, S.J. and Henry Chadwick.
- (2) Report of the Lambeth Conference of 1948 pp. 84-86