

ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSIONThird Meeting - Windsor, 1st - 8th September, 1971SOME COMMENTS ON THE VENICE PAPERS

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In the Tablet of January 16th, 1971 an anonymous writer looked forward to the publication of the papers and asked some pertinent questions about what might be expected. Would the Commission really tackle the problem of Authority in the Church? For 'the real crux comes over the assent that we are expected to give to statements made by the Church as our teacher.' Would the Commission have anything to say about Intercommunion and Orders? And would Unity be seen as "the presence in each country of a single local church, united in full communion with other Churches throughout the world?"

In February the papers were published in Theology. (Because of the postal strike their appearance in the Clergy Review and One in Christ was delayed.)

The Editor of Theology welcomed the privilege of publishing them as in itself an advance, and at the same time noted the pace at which inter-church relations are progressing.

An Editorial in The Tablet of February 6th stressed the new character of the present situation which made publication possible at all, and which, in the papers themselves, led to fresh approaches to old questions. It welcomed the rejection of polemical attitudes, & noted that both sides are asked to make "what will certainly be thought of as concessions", Anglicans on the Petrine Office, Roman Catholics on the Bull Apostolicae Curae.

The Editor of the Clergy Review (February 1971) felt that the papers were 'very thin', and hoped that the members of the Commission would get 'a little tougher-minded'. He emphasised that if we are ever to arrive at Unity, 'minds will have to be changed. This is done not by a process of painless convergence but by criticism, revision of judgments, conversion and the assent of faith.'

In One in Christ No. 2-3, 1971, Fr. John Coventry, S.J., welcomed the publication of the papers, and noted 'with appreciation the very large measure of agreement on important matters that these statements express'. His criticisms will be included below according to subject-matter, as will those of Fr. Michael Walsh, S.J. who in the Month for April 1971, commented that 'the Anglican-Roman Catholic conversations proceed like a medieval disputation' on the assumption that 'the two sides will progressively narrow the field of argument until the fundamental point of difference has been revealed.' He added that 'the decision to publish them at all is perhaps more important than the content of the documents'.

These journals printed only one or two letters about the papers in their later numbers - again the postal strike was largely responsible. (Or were people happy to read, but not stirred enough to write?) A letter in Theology in May pointed to the present signs that in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations 'something powerful is gestating'. In the Clergy Review for July Fr. Henry St. John, O.P. wrote that 'ecumenical progress will only take place where each step is grounded in a force of deep contemplative prayer, directed beyond human formulations

of truth, which though necessary and important in our human predicament, are not the object of prayer but rather only an aid to it'. He welcomed above all the fact that the Commission's findings were given 'together in Unity of heart' rather than, as in the past, 'in isolation and perhaps antagonism'.

The Revd. Dr. Harry Smythe, following discussion of the papers at the Anglican Centre in Rome, reported criticism of the Commission's composition (why not include women, non-Europeans, more Biblical theologians, more 'Protestant' Anglicans?), exclusive attention to doctrinal subjects, place of meeting (why not Belfast?), and its assumption that "notional or ideational unity is the primary pre-requisite for going on to other things, in this case, 'full organic union'". Will the Commission, he asked, assist the two churches in 'growing together' by the method of procedure adopted to date?

The Venice papers have been, and will continue to be, studied by National Anglican Roman Catholic Groups in all parts of the world. What follows, however, is a bringing together of comments so far sent to the Anglican Secretary to the Commission, from the South African Commission (S.A.) the Joint Study Group of Representatives of the Roman Catholic and Scottish Episcopal Churches (S.), Lord Fisher of Lambeth (F.), the Society of the Holy Cross (S.H.C.), and the published reviews mentioned above by Fr. John Coventry (J.C.) and Fr. Michael Walsh (M.W.), together with a review by the Revd. Douglas Carter, in Faith and Unity, April 1971 (D.C.), who suggests that Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue needs the presence of the Orthodox, while Fr. Michael Walsh argues that "the third and absent partner, contemporary man in his indifference and unbelief" should be kept in mind, so that members of the Commission might together "work out the relevance for him of the Christian Faith today".

1. CHURCH

It has been suggested (J.C.) that there is 'a very clear case for a single, full introductory statement on ecclesiology, as a preliminary to separate discussions of Authority, Ministry, and Eucharist, on the foundations it provides.' Following this, and the proposed pattern for Windsor 1971 that Authority and Ministry should be discussed as one subject these comments on the Venice papers have been arranged under three headings:

1. Church
2. Eucharist
3. Authority and Ministry

References to the published papers are by letter (A,E,M,) and the number of the section in question.

Much attention has focussed on the various uses of the words Church, Koinonia, Communion (A 1-4; 7; 9; E 1-5; M 1-2). It is claimed that confusion results from this (J.C.), or that in E 1-2 the only solid fact is that 'the Church is the ecclesia' (F.). What is meant by saying in E 3 that 'Church and communion are not identical' ? (S). Would simpler language give a clearer and less prejudice-prone picture than do technical terms like schism, magisterium, communion, etc. ? (S.)

More positively it is argued that it would be better to begin by saying that the inner focus of the Church's Unity is the Trinity in Unity. This would show the weakness of treating ecclesiology chiefly in terms of the Church's external structure. (D.C.) In any case to the three elements named in A 4 as 'constitutive of a Church' should be added scripture, the life of holiness, evangelism, and other elements (J.C.). Or it could be stated that "The Church manifests itself as the community of believers, covenanted together in Christ (1) by the faith professed by the apostles, (2) by the Sacraments, (3) under the oversight of a fully accepted apostolic ministry". (S.A.)

Two writers go further than this by asking for a more adequate ecclesiology "to express the relation of 'visible Churches' to the Kingdom of Christ and to each other". The first (J.C.) suggests that this may be found, following the Decree on Ecumenism, by considering 'The One Church of Christ' as a middle term between the totally heavenly and eschatological reality of the Kingdom and the visible and historical reality of Church or Churches. If this is done then Roman Catholics could agree that the One Church of Christ exists in the world in a divided state, while also wishing to assert that it exists most fully in the Roman Catholic Church. Schism is within the One Church of Christ, but the Anglican Communion exists in schism from the visible communion of the Catholic Church. The second (M.W.) describes the Catholic Church, like every other Christian ecclesial community, as 'a pilgrim Church going forward under the guidance of the Spirit. What distinguishes the Roman Church from the Anglican Communion is not simply the claim to be the One Church of Christ, the fullest affective, but still imperfect, expression in history of that Unity for which Christ prayed, but also the position within the Church of the Bishop of Rome.' What seems to be wanted is an ecclesiology that will do justice to 'the One Church of Christ', to the

divisions between visible Churches, and to the claims of different Churches to be adequate, full, or 'the fullest possible' expression of the Church of Christ. This is why A 2 provoked the comment (F.) that 'the Church is one in itself' and A 9 was dismissed (S.A.) as 'much too smug' together with the reminder (F.) that 'for us the schism was a great liberation both for Church and for Nation.' This is also why in E 13 it is suggested (S.A.) that the Anglican view is better given in the words: "Anglicans believe that the Church exists in the world in a divided state."

In the section on Church in E it has been suggested (S.A.) that section 4 should become section 2; that section 2 should begin: "Calling men to membership of a community, God demands the response of faith and commitment"; that the second paragraph of 2 "while it is agreed... Church and communion" and the sentence "There are degrees of Communion" should be deleted; and that "common" is better than "mutual" acceptance of the Scriptures.

In A 1 it is suggested (S.A.) that the section should end as follows: "All that the Church believes and does derives its meaning from an immediate reference to Him. He is the prime agent in the Church's saving actions, notably Baptism and the Eucharist. He it is in whom the Bible finds its focus and fulfilment and it is the authority of His word that the believing community finds there."

In M 1 (F. and S.A.) a specific reference to baptism is needed after the words "sacramental incorporation into Christ."

2. EUCCHARIST

Sacrifice (E.II 1-4) The question of the relation of the Eucharist to Christ's Sacrifice was raised by several writers. Two of them argued that Hebrews and Catholic Theology teach that (J.C.) "Christ expiated or cleansed our sins by pouring his blood on the heavenly sanctuary... The Resurrection in its ascension aspect is integral to the Sacrifice... This makes it possible to see the Eucharist as the sacrament of Christ's sacrifice, in which Christ exercises not his over-and-done—with priesthood but his eternal priesthood." Through Resurrection and Ascension (M.W.) Christ's sacrifice became an eternal one. It is then stated (J.C.) that E II 3 fails to assimilate the resurrection and so fails also 'to lay the proper foundation for the Eucharistic doctrine of E II 4 and 8'. Furthermore 'it was precisely the tendency on both sides to regard Christ's sacrifice as terminating at the Cross, and therefore once-for-all in the past, that made it impossible for Protestants to see how the Eucharist could be its sacramental expression without seeming to repeat it or add to it.' The solution lies in seeing Christ's sacrifice as "once-for-all as a heavenly event, as an eternal event, and not merely as an event in past history." This will make it possible in E.II 8 to add that "we see the Eucharist as the memorial of Christ's historical and eternal self-offering."

The Commission is invited (S.) to explore agreement on the nature of the Eucharistic sacrifice as a sacrament of the sacrifice of Calvary, pointing to a res et sacramentum viz. the sacrificial flesh and blood of Christ, really present under the sign of his self-giving at the Last Supper. It is also stressed (S.) that in the Eucharist the reality of Christ's saving work is present, as well as the effects of Calvary. (Are these perhaps personal and impersonal ways of describing the same thing?)

Passover (E II 2 & 8) One writer (F.) questions 'how far should the Eucharist always now be celebrated consciously in the context of the Passover?' Another (M.W.) does not see a solution in the Biblical analogies the Commission recommends. It is asked (F.) whether more attention should be given to the teaching of the Prophets and to the insights of Hebrews concerning the 'new and living way'. One is reminded of the remark of the Greek Orthodox theologian Savvas Agourides that "the disciples do not adjust Jesus to their Jewish presuppositions and expectations, but adapt the latter to the reality which is called Jesus." It is also felt (S.) that a clearer statement is needed of (a) the Jewish concept of "memorial" ("remembering" is preferred by S.A., who also wish "in the light of Hebraic usage" to replace "in the light of the Old and New Testaments.") and (b) its Christian application to the Eucharistic presence and the Eucharistic sacrifice. S.A. would also like the restoration in E.II 8 of paragraphs 2 and 5 of section II of their original draft, 'since the terms Mysterion and Sacramentum have contributed to the expression of the Eucharist in sacrificial terms.'

Priesthood (E.II 4) It is claimed (F.) that this seems to make Christ the sole celebrant, and does not do justice to the priest celebrating, or concelebrating with Christ, not as an 'alter Christus' but with the authority committed to him. There should also (S.) be more said than the reference to "particular liturgical functions"

since this could apply equally to Presbyterian Church order, and the phrase "the whole Church shares Christ's priesthood" needs further explanation if the impression is not to be given that there is only Christ's priesthood and the priesthood of all believers.

"It is Christ who proclaims forgiveness of our sins and identifies us with his perfect obedience" is preferred (S.A.) to the sentence "It is Christ... grace to amend."

Eucharist (E.II 5-7) The statement in E.II 5 that "in the Eucharist the Church becomes most intensely itself" is questioned (F.), because it is felt that the intensity depends on the degree in which the community are worshipping in spirit and in truth. In the final sentence of 5 it is suggested (S.A.) that a better statement is "offers Himself for, with, and to his people". In 6 (S.) the word "foretaste" needs amplifying, and for consistency's sake (S.A.) the Biblical reference should be omitted. In 7 (S.A.) 'Synaxis' should be omitted and after 'acceptable term' should be added: 'since all are agreed that the giving of thanks over bread and wine constituted a basic theme in all primitive Christian liturgies.'

Presence (E.II 10) A distinction is called for (S.) between the fact of Christ's presence (and so of the Eucharistic change) and the philosophical explanation of the how of that presence and change. For it is felt (S. and S.A.) that the reality of the change need not divide, while the philosophical explanation of the change is a matter for speculation not faith. Furthermore Transubstantiation as a philosophy is not entailed by Transubstantiation as a doctrine. Compare paragraph II 2c of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Statement on the Eucharist (A./R.C.I.C. 31D). It is felt (S.A.) that the point is expressed better in their original paragraph II 8. Another suggestion (M.W.) is that reference should be made to Vatican II's words about the presence of Christ in the person of his minister, in the proclaimed word, and in the assembly of the faithful gathered in his name.

Eucharistic Practice (E.III) It is pointed out (S.A.) that the matter under 'Special Intentions' in their original draft has been omitted and should be retained, together with the further matter there about "Reservation."

Intercommunion (E.IV) This should be added as a subject for Future work (S.A.) In the section as it stands criticism is made (J.C.) of being content with two official statements at variance with one another. It would be better, it is said, to state openly that the main blockage to even limited progress over reciprocal communion is the question of Anglican orders. It is encouraging (M.W.) if the reference in A 18 to 'mutual agreement on a profession of faith' as a pre-condition for communicatio in sacris is a hint that this may well be achieved. But it should be remembered that Huntercombe pointed out that agreement and divergence often cut across the line of division between the two Churches. What are the implications for 'an agreed profession of faith' of the fact that Cardinal Ottaviani and Fr. Schillebeeckx are both in communion with Pope Paul? Finally, the Commission is reminded (F.) that the 1968 Lambeth Conference resolution referred to has no authority of itself, and the passage quoted came originally from the Report of a Commission which was not accepted by the Convocations.

3. AUTHORITY AND MINISTRY

Authority and Infallibility (A 8, 12, 16, 17)

On the Infallibility of Papal Definitions (A 8) one writer (D.C.) feels that it is held that the Church's assent indicates whether a decision may be infallible. Another (J.C.) is puzzled by the statement that 'the Church's consent is not constitutive of the truth of the defined doctrine.' He would prefer that it should be said that such definitions are known to be true because they are papally defined and not because of the Church's subsequent consent.

Some Anglicans (S.H.C.) do speak of the infallibility of the Church as well as its indefectibility. Others would ask (F), has the Church of England any doctrine of the indefectibility of the Church Militant? It should be added, as was clear at a recent meeting in London of Sub-Commissions of the Roman Catholic Ecumenical Commission for England and Wales and of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Roman Catholic Relations, that some Anglicans want to question all claims to infallible authority. They feel that Christians are wrong to seek an infallible authority in Pope or Bible or Church, and even more so to claim that they have found it.

It is also argued (F.) that the teaching office of the Church is normally exercised through many grades of teachers all teaching in their own right and with their own personal authority, even if it is a delegated authority. In view of this, it is added (J.C.) that as the teaching function of Christ is given to the whole Church, the teaching office of the College of Bishops can only be properly understood within this shared gift in a defining and authenticating capacity.

In A 16 more is needed (S.A.) on the 'hierarchy of truths', if what is meant is that those truths which are clearly contained in Scripture should be regarded as being the fundamental truths in any hierarchical conception of truths.

On A 17 can we say (F.) that for Full Communion is required a Harmony of Doctrines rather than a Unification of Theologies?

The Papacy (A 6, 8, 11, 13-14; M 10-14)

The Papacy (M.W.) is the central problem. It needs to be seen within a thoroughly worked-out ecclesiology. It is regretted that none of the Venice documents discuss the conflicting opinions about it exhaustively. It is also felt (J.C. & M.W.) that in A 8 the real issue is not faced, namely the nature of the Pope's responsibility (and therefore authority) and the sort of legal expression or definition (if any) it would need to have in a united Church. It is said (J.C.) to be unfortunate that the R.C. view of potestatem ordinariam et immediatam (which should (S.A.) be either explained or omitted) is stated first, and then followed (A 12-14) by a more positive and encouraging explanation of the real meaning of the papacy which is said to be 'the Anglican view' as if it were not held by Roman Catholics. It would also have been better to say (D.C.) that the problems surrounding the emergence of monarchical episcopacy at Rome are on a level with

problems of other "tunnel periods" in the history of Christian origins. More positively, it is suggested (D.C.) that the insights of the early church would lead Anglicans to focus not on 1870 but on the papal office as it was before the dominance of a "universal" ecclesiology and development of the papacy's political role. They might then recognise that "the Petrine legacy is inherited corporately by the faithful, collegially by the episcopate, and personally by the Bishop of Rome."

In A II it has been suggested (S.H.C.) that the second paragraph on "the Petrine Office" should begin "Some/many Anglicans believe" but that the views of "other Anglicans like us" should also be mentioned, since "we do believe that the Pope is the successor of St. Peter and that he does inherit the prerogatives that were assigned to St. Peter by our Lord as recorded in the Scripture. We hold that the Anglican Church has never officially denied the spiritual primacy of the Pope, but only his claim in the past to a temporal principality."

In A 13 "many Anglicans would argue" might be replaced (S.A.) by "they are representative of a growing body of opinion within the Anglican Communion".

Some Anglicans however would argue differently. For not only is it felt (F.) that the Roman Catholic idea of collegiality (A 13) is not an Anglican idea, but that if it is legitimate for Roman Catholics to stress primus inter pares, than Anglicans can emphasise primus inter pares. It is also questioned (F.) whether the Church of England or the Anglican Communion know anything at all of a "President of the Council of Bishops" with a special dignity and voice or with a special paternal authority. The Archbishop of Canterbury has a paternal voice but his authority has diminished since he is no longer an Archbishop presiding over his fellow diocesan bishops of the Anglican Communion but one Archbishop and Metropolitan among many. A slightly different suggestion is made by S.A. that 'President of the Council of Bishops' applies now to the separate provinces of the Anglican Communion, and this should be stated explicitly.

In M 10 it is suggested (S.A.) that the second sentence should read: "Anglicans commonly question whether the Roman bishops are the historical successors of Peter, and whether he in fact exercised a distinctive office which was transmissible." M II (a) and (b) both require further elucidation and references.

It is further stated (F.) with reference to A 14 that "the only focus of unity in the Church Militant or the Church Mystical is Christ Himself. There never has been a visible focus of final authority for the whole Church Militant. Even St. Peter was never that." By contrast another writer (J.C.) asks: Is not the papacy as a focus of unity in a united Church the whole point? And is it not fruitful to approach the papacy in terms of an efficacious sign or sacrament of unity? With this a resolution of the South African Commission in December 1969 agrees: "We look forward to a reunion of Christendom having its necessary centre and focus in the primacy of the see of Rome with which all Christians would be in communion, and which, freed from elements that have obscured its true nature and significance, would express the Kingship of Christ and the unity of the people of God."

Ministry (A 3, M 3-9)

A better opening statement on ministry in A 3 would be (S.A.) "The apostolic ministry given by the Lord, serving the preaching and sacramental life of the Church, is meant to be an important sign of unity and a means of deepening it." Others comment that M requires (J.C.) a clear statement on the primacy of service of God over service of the Church or the world. That M 3 should at least mention service of God (S.A.) and that the impression should not be given that the Church, but not the world, is the 'sphere of God's salvation'. It is also asked what 'simplicity of service' means (S.A.).

Two different approaches to ministry are suggested. The first (D.C.) begins with the local congregation, the eucharistic community, as a manifestation of the Church in its fulness. 'The distinctive role of the priest is to preside in the eucharistic assembly. From this role flows his pastoral responsibility to proclaim the word and to exercise pastoral care both within the assembly and beyond it.' The second (F.) writes that the pattern of ministry set by Christ himself is entirely personal and pastoral. This pattern is fundamental to the life of the Church and every "ministry" within it.

In M 4 and 5, apart from criticising an excessive use of the word 'special', it is argued (S.A.) that the place of the Church in the call to the ministry needs emphasising. 'From within' seems to neglect the work of ministry outside the congregation (S.A.) 'Min of the Church' smacks of clericalism (S.A.). And the impression that the 'sacrificial life' is for clergy only should be removed by adding "pioneering witness" or a similar phrase.

In M 9 it is felt (S.A.) that three questions that require an answer are avoided: 1. Whether any authority is vested by Christ in the whole people of God. (we think it is). 2. What the relation is between this authority and that of the ordained ministry. 3. Whether the apostolic succession refers to the whole Church or only an ordained group within the Church.

Anglican Orders (M 15-17)

"The Roman Catholic reader squirms to read the explanation of doctrinal development in M 16. It sounds so much like saying, 'we are ready to change our tune if our face can be saved'. We should be ready to change if the former tune struck false notes. Can it not be said, the new situation demands a new policy, and a new doctrinal understanding is making previous theological positions seen increasingly inadequate, without any doctrine of faith being questioned." (J.C.)

Other writers (S.A.) call for a firmer statement that Apostolicae Curae is not an irreversible dogmatic document and that the theological presuppositions and historical judgments it is based on are nowadays being seriously re-examined. If this is so, there is no need for theological development since then to be consistent with the assumptions of 1896, but it should be stated rather that this development has served to call these assumptions into question.

The question of Anglican orders should (S.) be faced as the one great obstacle to Intercommunion, and from the present situation, not just historically. The Commission itself should (J.C.) tackle the question of the transmission of orders and ministry rather than assert the need of its being tackled. Attention should be given to the two books by J. J. Hughes (S.H.C.) "whose reappraisal of Anglican Orders seems to us to be conclusive," and (S.A.) to a paper on Anglican Orders by Fr. Jerome Smith O.P., written for the South African Commission. And in place of the final sentence of M 17 which is (S.A.) "wrapped in the cloak of its own obscurity" a positive reference could be made to Pope Paul's recent description of the Anglican Church as "our beloved Sister Church" and the implications of this phrase.

Finally, it is argued (J.C.) that the basic question posed by the title of the third of the Venice papers has not been faced: What is the relation of Church and Ministry? Is ministry to be recognized in so far as a Church is recognized to be an adequate embodiment of the One Church of Christ, or vice versa?