

ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION
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PROSPECTS FOR REUNION

by The Bishop of Ripon

A Commission such as this needs, from time to time, to look at itself and to ask itself what, in fact, it is trying to do. There is, as we all know, a temptation to turn a group like this into a theological debating society, meeting together to discuss points of disagreement in the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. But this, I imagine, is not our primary duty. We have been set up as a Commission to plan the union of the two Churches, and we accepted this charge when we said, here at Windsor, in January 1970, that "no doubt exists in the minds of any of the members that the final aim of our work is the attainment of full organic union between our two Communion" (Press Release). Furthermore, the fact that we changed our title from a "Permanent" to an "International" Commission emphasised the fact that we have a terminus, a goal, a point when we shall have completed our task and be dissolved. That point could be nothing less than having submitted a scheme or plan - or perhaps more accurately a policy or a method, which, if accepted by both sides, would lead eventually to two Churches becoming one.

I use the word "method" rather than "scheme" because I am very doubtful whether Schemes are likely to get us where we want to be. We have learnt (or are in process of learning) here in England how difficult it is to find a Scheme for union to which two Churches which have deep differences in both thought and practice can agree. The Scheme for a union of the Church of England with the Methodists in England has shown how great the difficulties are. These two communions have much in common; but one has an episcopal and the other a non-episcopal ministry, and the attempt to overcome this by a Service of Reconciliation has not brought general satisfaction. But if an Anglican-Methodist Scheme has little hope of acceptance, I think we should have to admit that an Anglican-Roman Catholic Scheme of Union would present just as great problems, though of a different kind.

In the first place, Organic Unity assumes that you are dealing with two Churches, each identifiable, and each with an accepted theology, liturgy, administration and way of life. When you talk about Anglicanism (or Roman Catholicism), you must know - and your opponent must know - what you are talking about. But this is very difficult when one of the parties is the Anglican Communion. For we all know that Anglicanism is, in some ways, an odd assortment of believers, occasional conformists and do-gooders with very

varying ideas about God, or the Church, or anything else. We also know that the Anglican Communion is what is called "comprehensive", which means that it can, in some way, hold together conservatives and radicals, orthodox and unorthodox, romanizers and pan-protestants, the catholic and the evangelically-minded.

But this I believe to be true not only of the Anglican Communion. In the last few years has not the Roman Catholic Church become much more comprehensive? You would, I think, find in Amsterdam a very different kind of Mass from what you would find in Palermo. The theology of some Roman Catholic writers would be thought by others to border on the unorthodox, if not heretical. A good many subjects could be named in which it would be difficult to find unanimity - such as Birth Control, Celibacy, the meaning of the Mass, and so on. The old monolith, which seemed in the past to be descriptive of Rome, is undoubtedly showing some cracks and fissures. Writing mainly of the United States, John Macquarrie says: "The present bitter struggles beneath a façade of unity in the Roman Catholic Church are clearly evidence of what happens when differences are too tightly compressed within an inclusive framework" (Theology, October, 1970).

Secondly - and because of differences of thought and conviction in both Churches - it is going to be very difficult to carry the whole of either Church into any agreement. The most protestant of Anglicans (who, if asked, might be tempted to say, with the "Westminster Confession" that they believe the Pope to be "that Anti-Christ, that man of sin and son of perdition that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is God"), and the most ultramontane of Roman Catholics, who might think that those not in communion with the Holy See have neither hope nor prospect of salvation, would obviously find it difficult to accept any sort of Scheme which attempts to overcome these differences. Any suggestion, in fact, that these two Churches can be manoeuvred or manipulated into one by a series of negotiations, bargains, concessions, ultimate terms, quid pro quo's, ne plus ultra's and so on, is unrealistic. And yet "no doubt exists in the minds of any of us" that our job is to turn the two Churches into one.

Perhaps, then, we ought at this stage to give some thought to what we mean by "union", what kind of relationship between the members of our Churches we are trying to create.

Here, I feel, we should be unwise to take the policies of the World Council of Churches as our model. For if the member Churches of the World Council hope to bring into existence what they call "the coming great Church", then I doubt whether they can expect much success. For their vision, as set out at New Delhi in 1961, is of a number of areas or districts, in each of which lives a conglomeration of Christians - Roman Catholics, Baptists, Anglicans, Quakers, Orthodox and Pentecostals - all living together in

brotherly love and harmony, regardless of the very great differences between them. They believe (so they say) that the kind of unity which God desires is that "all in each place" should join together by "holding one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer..... and be united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all" (New Delhi Speaks, 1962, p.55). Although this was drawn up before Vatican II, and therefore belongs to pre-Vatican ecumenism, it must even then have been a chimaera. It begs so many questions - on Intercommunion, Recognition of all Ministries, agreement on fundamentals of the faith - that it could be achieved only on the basis of the lowest possible common denominator and result in a vague fellowship in which no questions were asked and no convictions required - or perhaps even tolerated. No one can suppose that the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Churches would be able or willing to sell out and join this consortium on these terms, especially if the visionary Church hopes to be in fellowship with Christians not only "of all places" but "of all ages". In fact, any form of unity which requires the agreement of all Christians suggests that the divisions among us are not based on conviction or belief, but are due to habit, ignorance, (invincible or otherwise), obstinacy, lack of faith or just damned impertinence.

But if we turn our faces away (as I think we must do) from this kind of unity, must we not also turn them away from anything which might be described as a policy of surrender, absorption, the take-over bid, the biggest Church gradually acquiring control over all the smaller ones ?

We are, then, in a great difficulty as to how we should plan out our work. For we, on this Commission, are dealing with two Churches, each with strong convictions, deeply-ingrained habits and customs, and (I fear) considerable suspicion of each other. If we are to draw up a Scheme to which all members of both Churches could say "Amen", then I think we shall find ourselves sitting round this, or some other, table for a very long time - and our successors after us. For, quite frankly, a plan for organic unity of the kind with which we are familiar in other fields of ecumenical study is, as things are now, virtually unforeseeable so far as our two Churches are concerned. It would demand of Anglicans acceptance of the Primacy and Infallibility of the Pope; acceptance (at least tacit) of the Marian dogmas (since each of them says that any who deny the dogma have defected from the Church); it would require the ordination (conditional or otherwise) of all Anglican clergy in all parts of the world, beginning with the conferment of the "first tonsure" on the Archbishop of Canterbury. On the other hand, it would demand of all Roman Catholics a surrender of belief in the uniqueness of the Roman Catholic Church and of the argument based on Matthew XVI, 18; the abandonment of some of the legislation passed at Trent and Vatican I and II;

the acceptance of much greater freedom in belief and practice; and a new approach to some of the moral problems which affect people's lives at the most intimate points.

I doubt whether any of us see this sort of thing happening. And even if we, the members of this Commission, could see a way forward, what hopes have we of carrying our Churches with us? We must, therefore, start thinking about what kinds of relationship might conceivably be achieved. If we cannot, as things are at present, entertain much hope of organic unity in the sense that the two Churches will actually become one - each, in the process, losing something of its present identity - then we must think in terms of some other kind of unity, not total but partial.

Partial, as opposed to Full, Communion is one of the things referred to in paragraph 6 of the Malta Report which draws attention to the fact that Vatican II drew a distinction between these two kinds of communion. This is, presumably, a reference to De Ecumenismo 3, which says that, in the course of time, "large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church", developments for which both sides were to blame. It then goes on to say that all who "have been properly baptised are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church". This was, I remember, welcomed at the time by the observers who felt that it was much better to talk about "communion" than about "membership". Up till then it had been customary for many Catholics to think of the Church like a field with a fence round it. If you were inside the fence you were all right; if you were outside then you hadn't much hope. Moreover, it was the Church of Rome which marked out the boundaries and put up the fences.

For, in 1864, the Holy Office had told the bishops in England and Wales that "no congregation whatsoever separated from the eternal, visible communion and obedience to the Roman Pontiff can be the Church of Christ, or in any way whatever belong to the Church of Christ" (Denzinger, 2885-8). Then, in 1928, Pius XI had gone even further by saying that "whosoever is not united with the body is no member of it, neither is he in communion with Christ its head" (Mortalium animos, English trans. p.13). The first sign of any change came in Mystici Corporis in 1943 which introduced the idea of belonging to the Church "by some unconscious yearning or desire" (Denzinger, 3821), on which Gregory Baum writes: "The doctrine is perfectly clear. There are more ways than one of belonging to the Catholic Church. Either one is united to her in fact, or one is in union with her by desire" (That they may be one, pp. 177-9).

This is all right so far as it goes; and it was, no doubt, intended to break down some of the rigidity of the old "in-or-out" attitude. The trouble is that there is a very large number of faithful Christians who have in fact no "yearning or desire", conscious or unconscious, to belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

It was against this background that Vatican II had to face the fact of a divided Christendom for which Rome could not regard herself as wholly blameless; of Christian communities which, though not in communion with Rome, were obviously part of the People of God; and of a growing movement towards Christian unity from which the Roman Catholic Church could no longer regard herself as wholly detached. Hence the setting up of the Secretariat for Christian Unity before the Council met; the invitation to the other communities to send observers to the Council; the fact that John XXIII made it perfectly clear that one of the main topics of the Council was to be Reunion, even though his conception of reunion was mainly in terms of the return of the prodigal to his father's house (See Ad Petri Cathedram and other statements).

By these means, a totally new atmosphere had been created, and one which required the Council to think again about its doctrine of the Church, since the old definitions and delineations were ceasing to hold good. This was done in the early chapters of Lumen Gentium where we read: "God has gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and has established them as the Church" (par.9). The same idea is put - if anything more plainly - in De Ecumenismo, where we read that "Christ has gathered together the People of the New Covenant who are the Church" (qui est ecclesia: par.2). Later in the same document we read of the Holy Spirit ruling over the whole Church and bringing about "that marvellous communion of the faithful" - a phrase reminiscent of a passage in the Book of Common Prayer which refers to "the blessed company of all faithful people" - an expression which, by its very comprehensiveness, commends itself to many Anglicans.

Here then, we are on common ground; and it is against this background that the decree on Ecumenism introduces the idea of different degrees of communion. This means that we are living in a very different world from that of Mortalium animos and Mystici corporis. We are now concerned not so much with membership as with communion; and communion can be of many kinds - Full Communion, Partial Communion, Imperfect Communion, Unconscious Communion, and so on.

So far, so good; but we have still many difficulties to encounter, for who is to pronounce what degree of communion a Church, or a group of Christians, or an individual, has with Rome? Howard Root has, on his own admission, rather caricatured the whole process when he says "the standard of measurement is almost wholly quantitative. It is as though one could give numerical marks to the various churches out of the 100 per cent. possessed by Rome alone", and he goes on to suggest how the handicaps might work out. (The Second Vatican Council, ed. B.C.Pawley, p.143). This is, no doubt, meant to be taken rather lightly, but it does point to the fact that someone has to say what are the requirements for even "Partial communion" between the two Churches, and here there will most certainly be difficulties. All the same, progress has been

made; and if some Anglicans find this language of the decrees rather patronising - uttered "de haut en bas" - at least it is much better than being told that we were not in communion with Christ.

Any kind of communion, full or partial, will inevitably raise the question of belief. No one could be in any sort of communion with the Roman Catholic Church (or with the Anglican Communion for that matter) who did not accept the primary beliefs of Christianity as expressed, for example, in the Nicene Creed.

But there are many additions to these primary beliefs which have been regarded as essential by the Roman Catholic Church in the past, and it is here that discussion must come to rest sooner or later if communion is going to advance beyond the fundamental unity of the baptised. Most of us would, I imagine, accept the idea that some distinction may be drawn between a basic doctrine, such as the divinity of Christ, and (shall we say?) the doctrine of Transubstantiation. Does this, then, mean that the doctrines by which we live are capable of being "graduated"? Is there, in fact, a "hierarchy of truths" - some essential, others less essential or even optional?

In Mortalium animos any idea of a distinction being made between articles of faith which are fundamental and those which are not fundamental was ruled out. It says:

"For this reason it is that all who are truly Christ's believe, for example, the Conception of the Mother of God without stain of original sin with the same faith as they believe the mystery of the august Trinity, and the Incarnation of our Lord just as they do the infallible teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff" (Eng.Tr.1928 p.12).

The faith, as defined by the Roman Catholic Church, was, therefore, of obligation down to the smallest detail. There could be no room for doubt, or uncertainty or reservation. It was all or nothing.

But even before Vatican II there was already some discussion going on with some of the "Separated Brethren" on the question of fundamentals and non-fundamentals, or, as it was then called, "grades of doctrine". The matter was then raised in the Council on 25 November 1963 by Archbishop Pangrazio of Gorizia who said that

"to arrive at a fair estimate of both the unity which now exists among Christians and the diversity which still remains, it seems very important to me to pay close attention to the hierarchical order of revealed truths which express the mystery of Christ and those elements which make up the Church".

He then divided the articles of faith into two main categories. Some truths (he said) are "on the level of our final goal", others are "on the level of means towards salvation". Among

the former he put the mystery of the blessed Trinity, Incarnation and Redemption, Eternal Life, etc. Among the latter he mentioned such things as the hierarchical structure of the Church, Apostolic Succession, and so on. He then said:

"Doctrinal differences among Christians have less to do with the primary truths on the level of our final goal and deal mostly on the level of means which are certainly subordinate to those other primary truths".

(Printed in full in Council Speeches of Vatican II, ed. Congar, Kung and O'Hanlon, pp. 124-6).

It was from this intervention that eventually the idea of a hierarchy of truths got into the conciliar documents, especially in paragraph 11 of De Ecumenismo, where we read:

"When comparing doctrines, they (Catholic theologians) should remember that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or hierarchy of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith".

The subject is taken up again in the Directorium, Part 2, which says:

"We should always preserve the sense of an order based on degree, or of a hierarchy in the truths of Catholic doctrine..... Students should learn to distinguish between revealed truths, which all require the same assent of faith, and theological doctrines.....; between apostolic tradition and merely ecclesiastical tradition;..." or, as Cardinal Willebrands put it in his sermon at Cambridge in 1970, "truths need to be weighed, not counted".

But valuable though all this is, it still begs the question: Who is to make this distinction? Who holds the scales? Who is to put the doctrines in the right order or degree? Is the doctrine of the Assumption of Our Lady a revealed truth, or a theological doctrine, or perhaps no more than a pious option? Or what about Infallibility? Is this an apostolic tradition? (It seems to have been unknown to the apostles). Or is it an ecclesiastical tradition, based upon a particular and perhaps rather dubious interpretation of Matthew XVI, 18-19.

The idea of a hierarchy of truths is excellent in theory; but in practice it doesn't get us very far so long as one side claims the right of evaluation, the right to say what the relative weight or order shall be. We could have a pleasant theological debate on the distinction between "revealed truths" and "theological doctrines", but it would get us nowhere so long as the final word remained with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In other words, if a task like this were to be performed, it would require what, in the political world, would be called a "surrender of sovereignty". But is either side prepared for that?

So we come back to the idea of Authority, the right to decide, the right to give a ruling, an interpretation, as to what is essential to the faith. This is, as we all know, a very difficult subject, made much more difficult by the declaration on Infallibility. This is more than just papal infallibility - the infallibility of the pope in defining a doctrine concerning faith or morals - it means that one part of the Christian Church has the right to state what are the fundamentals of the faith. An article in the Tablet by our most learned and venerable member ended with these words:

"I am inclined to think that the traditional position, that agreement in professing one faith with an agreed set of dogmas is a prerequisite of ecclesiastical union, remains valid today and will remain valid. We shall have, I fear, to revert to the laborious task of explaining and recommending our dogmas". (Tablet, 6 March, 1971).

Bishop Butler will correct me if I am wrong, but this seems to me to say two things - (1) that it is "we" (the Roman Catholic Church) who shall decide what the necessary beliefs are ("our dogmas"); and (2) that the purpose of ecumenical discussion is to try to persuade Christians of other Churches to come round to our beliefs.

I don't want to go in any detail into the question of authority or of infallibility, though it lies at the very heart of our troubles. I know that Infallibility is a much more complex idea than is sometimes supposed by both Roman Catholics and others. I know that, when the pope issues a definition concerning faith or morals, he does it on behalf of, and with the consent of, the Church as a whole. I know that when he so speaks he is only claiming to exercise "that Infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed"; and I know that there is good scriptural warrant for divine assistance in discovering the truth, and that if the divine word is discoverable and identifiable, then it must be infallible, since God is truth. I know all that; and yet I (and many Anglicans and other non-Roman Catholics) are confused and troubled by two things - (1) a feeling that there is something fundamentally wrong in the very idea of any man issuing irreversible judgments, and (2) the apparently arbitrary way in which it is believed to operate.

There is no doubt that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. There is no doubt that God wishes his children to discover that Way and to learn that Truth. There is no doubt that the Truth is not hid, but is available to those who seek it. But the idea that God has given to certain men, by virtue of their office, authority to give final and irreversible decisions on matters which deeply exercise the minds of other wise and holy men, is, to some of us, baffling in the extreme. Secondly, there is the problem as to which papal pronouncements are infallible and which are not. On this question no one seems able to give a clear answer. There is, I

believe, what is sometimes known as "creeping infallibility" - a desire to stamp as infallible statements which were never intended to have that authority. For example, the Postulator of the Cause for the canonization of the forty English martyrs declared that "canonization is an act of the infallible teaching authority of the Church". Is that so? If it is, then it must be unlawful to question the sanctity of any single person whose name is on the list of the saints. But if the Postulator is wrong, who is right? To some of us it looks as if the decision as to whether or not a statement is to be regarded as infallible is no more than a matter of opinion, which does not help us very much. I once asked if Unam Sanctam issued by Boniface VIII in 1302 was an infallible decree since, in it, the pope deliberately defined a doctrine of the Church, namely:

"that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff" (Denziger, 870-75)

The answer I was given was No. But why not? It is clearly a definition of faith, and one which would at the time have undoubtedly carried the consensus fidelium. Must it then be believed by all Catholics today as an infallible statement? If so, it is quite inconsistent with much of the teaching of Vatican II.

There is no doubt that a good deal of confusion exists over this matter of Infallibility (see Infallibility in the Church, by A.M.Farrer and others, and Hans Kung's latest book); but it is all part of the whole question of authority, presenting it in its most intractable form- the ne plus ultra, the causa finita, against which there can be no appeal, and no future way of escape or correction. As long as it exists it is going to make any examination of the problem of a "hierarchy of truths" very difficult. The question is really this: Is there a basic and unchallengeable Christianity (as expressed in the accepted ancient formularies of the Christian Church) on which some kind of unity could be built - those doctrines which Archbishop Pangrazio described as being "on the level of our final goal"? Or must we accept the fact that there can be no union of two Churches until one side has been persuaded to accept all the dogmas of the other side. If the latter is the only way forward, then I cannot see much hope of making any progress. But if we are willing to accept the former, then I think there is indeed hope for the future.

Or is there another way of escape? Every truth has to be put into words in order to be promulgated. But words are tricky things, and have a way of changing their meaning as years go by. Paragraph 5 of the Malta Report says:

"We agree that revealed Truth is given in holy Scripture and formulated in dogmatic definitions, though in thought-forms and language which are historically conditioned".

Is this what John XXIII meant when he drew a distinction between the deposit of faith and the way in which it is formulated? If so, does it provide some elasticity, some room to manoeuvre?

All this raises many problems, some of which are beyond our capacity to solve. But it is our job to suggest ways in which our two Churches can unite, to propose some structure, some relationship, some spiritual alliance which would create the kind of soil in which growth can take place.

In his sermon at Cambridge in January 1970, Cardinal Willebrands referred to our Commission and said that he hoped we should, in due course, come up with some kind of programme or method.

"I would go so far as to hope (he said) that a limited period, say five years, might allow them to give, conscientiously and loyally, this service which they are qualified to give to the Churches. This would not mean that, by that time, we should have before us a full programme and concrete outline of a scheme of unity. Dialogue, however, would have entered upon a new stage, studying concrete ways and modalities of future unity".

Note here the "limited period" and the "new stage of dialogue". The first reminds us of the urgency of the situation; the second of the need for courage, imagination and hope.

There are already in existence various kinds of union between Churches, and we must look at these to see if we can draw any help from them.

The first is Full Communion as it now exists between the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholics on the basis of the Bonn Agreement drawn up in 1931. This gives three conditions:

- (1) Each Communion recognises the catholicity and independence of the other, and maintains its own.
- (2) Each Communion agrees to admit members of the other Communion to participate in the Sacraments.
- (3) Intercommunion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.

This is a model for a type of union, for it is (as you will see) based on the principle of "hierarchy of truths", mutual recognition of orders, unity without uniformity.

The second kind of union is that on the principle of the Uniate Churches. A proposal that the Anglican Communion should become a Uniate Church, on the lines of the Uniate Churches of the East, was made at the Malines Conversations, fifty years ago, by Cardinal Mercier and Dom Beauduin. The phrase used was "unie non absorbée", and it was welcomed by both sides since it showed that the Conversations were concerned with the union of Churches and not with the conversion of individuals.

The idea has floated about in ecumenical discussions, but without (I think) much serious attention being paid to it. It was revived in an article in the Tablet of 31 January 1970 after two notable sermons preached in England - Cardinal Willebrands at Cambridge and Bishop Butler in Westminster Cathedral - and after an article by Bishop Butler in the following March. Since then it has had a new boost by the phrase used by Pope Paul at the Canonization of the Forty Martyrs, when he referred to the Anglican Communion as a "sister-church".

The strong point about a Uniate proposal is that it is based on the coming together of Churches, not on the conversion of individuals. It would certainly help in mutual education and perhaps strengthen both Churches. "A blending of Anglican and Catholic characters", wrote a Jesuit as long ago as 1934, "would produce an amalgam far superior to either of them, and produce results that neither of them could bring about separately." Fr. Jerome (Revd. A. Gille, S.J.) A Catholic Plea for Reunion (1934), p.67. The same thought appears also in De Ecumenismo (par. 5) which says:

"Nor should we forget that whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian never conflicts with the genuine interests of the faith: indeed, it can always result in a more ample realisation of the very mystery of Christ and the Church."

Nevertheless, the proposal would leave many problems unsolved. There would be the problem of universal acceptance, of persuading all Anglicans to accept those beliefs which the Roman Catholic Church would almost certainly lay down as basic and essential. There would be the problem of co-existence, of parallel hierarchies. I know that this already happens in some places in North America and in the Near East. But it would create great problems in a country like England. Again, it would, to some extent, perpetuate division - difference of worship, culture, organization. I don't know what happens, for example, in Winnipeg where there are two bishops, one of the Latins, the other of the Ukrainians; but my guess is that the two communities do not meet much, and, of course, neither is indigenous. It would obviously be much more difficult in countries like England and Ireland where prejudices are so strong and the burden of history so heavy.

Let us turn, then, to another kind of union - namely, Local Unions. If we take seriously Willebrands' plea that we should get something going within five years, we may have to think of unions taking place piecemeal and locally. In a matter of such great difficulty, it is inevitable that some parts of the world will move more rapidly than others. But must everyone wait for the slowest member?

In the U.S.A., for example, joint consultation on what is called A.R.C. is obviously making good progress, as its reports show. It is even considering the possibility of "regional re-union" in parts, if not in the whole, of the United States.

"It might be possible in America and elsewhere", writes one of its Anglican (Episcopal) members, "for Roman Catholics to declare their acceptance of Anglican orders and for intercommunion to be officially approved. Looking further ahead, such regions might be granted provincial autonomy of jurisdiction while remaining in full communion with the rest of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches".

In parts of Africa things are happening rapidly, and there is some impatience at the slowness with which they move in the North and West. When I was in Malawi in 1969 I found a state of affairs very different from what I was accustomed to in England. But here the problems were easier - the Anglicans were traditionally all of the same churchmanship and the Roman Catholics mostly members of religious orders such as the White Fathers and Montfort Fathers with a good deal of French blood in them. But this, in itself, would give support to the idea of regional unions.

Before, however, anything in the nature of a local union could take place, some agreement would have to be reached on the nature and function of the Church, and some guarantee found that the newly-united Church would not find itself isolated or perhaps even abandoned by both its parents. Supposing, for example, that the two Anglican dioceses of Malawi desired to enter into a full, but local union with the six Roman Catholic dioceses; how could this be done?

Would the Vatican, from its authoritative and centralised position, tolerate a mutual recognition of ministries, Apostolicae curae notwithstanding? Or which of the dogmas (about which we have been thinking today) would be regarded as fundamental and inescapable?

In other words, a local union would necessitate some delegation of authority from Rome, and some loss of sovereignty. Is this likely to happen?

As part of his theory about Co-responsibility, Cardinal Suenens has looked at this question of the local Church. He speaks of two points of view - that of those who regard the Church from a central position, who see it as "a perfect society, with a clearly-defined and supreme authority with universally applicable laws" and they think of the local churches as just "administrative departments" of this one Church, and the bishops as administrators of those departments who have to take all their orders from the centre. But, he says, there is another view - the view from the periphery, which sees the Church in its own area as "an evangelical reality", "a people made up of brothers in communion with the Divine Life of the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (See Tablet, 17 May 1969).

Taking this as a starting-point, we should have to discuss the question of what is the Church, e.g. in Malawi? Is it limited to those in communion with the Holy See? Or is it the People of God - the qui est ecclesia of De Ecumenismo (par. 2)? If so, does it include the Calvinists, who, with strong support from South Africa, form a large and active Christian group in the country? In the face of strong pressure from Muslims, animists, communists, materialists and others, what is the Christian community in a developing country like Malawi? Has it any homogeneity? Is it in any sense "an evangelical reality"? And, if so, is it seen to be such? None of us can answer these questions, for presumably the Congregation for Evangelism, meeting in the Vatican, would claim to have the last word.

The Anglican Communion is less authoritative and centralised than Rome, and has already accepted the principle of the local Church, even though it means, to some extent, the disintegration of the Anglican Communion. In 1947 four Anglican dioceses in South India deliberately surrendered their membership of the Anglican Communion in order to help to create the united Church of South India. The same thing could, presumably, happen elsewhere - e.g. in Malawi or Tanzania, though, in this case, it would be a union with the Roman Catholic Church and not with a group of non-episcopal churches. Such a move would, undoubtedly, encounter some opposition, as the Church of South India plan did. But that opposition was overcome in time. It is possible, therefore, that a plan for union with the Roman Catholic Church in some part of the world might be proposed. But, if it were, what line would Rome take? Would it allow the Church in that area to do things which would certainly be forbidden elsewhere - e.g. to recognise Anglican orders and thus make Intercommunion possible?

There is no doubt whatever that the aim of our consultations is the organic union of our two Churches. We accepted this at our first meeting last year, and it has been stated again by the Anglican Consultative Council in March of this year, in whose report we read that the ultimate goal of this Commission is "the organic union of the two Churches" (The Time is Now, 1971, p.7).

Hitherto, the only way in which two or more Churches have set out to achieve organic union has been by some kind of plan or agreement which would be acceptable to both or all parties - e.g. Church of South India, Consultation on Church Union in the United States, the Anglican-Methodist Scheme in England, and so on. The desks of ecumenists are piled high with schemes and plans from all over the world. I hope very much that we shall not feel it our duty to add to this pile by producing yet another scheme which is a mass of compromises, concessions, ambiguities, uncertainties and bargains, for I doubt very much whether this sort of thing is much use.

Indeed, there is a feeling - and I think a growing feeling - that this sort of procedure is not going to succeed, and indeed has broken down in a good many cases. Professor Macquarrie of Oxford wrote, (in Theology October 1970) a very interesting article on "Is Organic Union Desirable?" The answer - as you would expect - was No. The Ecumenical Movement, he said, is good in that it has led to new openness, charity and co-operation. It is bad in that it tends to get into the hands of administrators and bureaucratic establishments and is made the subject of negotiations and political pressures. It is bad, also, in that it leads to uniformity, drabness and complacency as Churches with distinctive ways of life and worship find that they have to surrender some of their special characteristics for the sake of harmony. Macquarrie's plea, then, is to put schemes on one side for the moment and foster every kind of co-operation and fellowship between Christians. At the very end of his article he uses the phrase "secular ecumenism", which, he says, "is concerned not primarily with ironing out theological differences or even with enjoying the blessings of intercommunion, but with obeying Christ's call to service". "This kind of ecumenism", he says, "has priority over every other kind"; and, in another article on the same subject, he says: "Our primary sense of unity and solidarity ought to be with those who are dropping dead of starvation or being denied a decent human existence in a thousand other ways".

With all this I am very much in sympathy; but it is no good just knocking out Schemes unless we have something to put in their place, some other method of turning two Churches into one. What, then, ought to be done? What ought this Commission to recommend to our "principals", and (even more) to the members of our two communions? Have we any concrete proposals which we believe will help our Churches to move towards organic unity, or are we in danger of turning ourselves into a theological debating-society? What, in fact, is our reply to the challenge put out by Cardinal Willebrands that we should offer some definite proposals within five years from the beginning of 1970?

I would like to suggest three things:

(1) That we demand what has been called communicatio in Spiritu on every possible occasion, and that we should ask those who appointed us - the Pope and the Archbishop - to do all in their power to make this possible. We talk much about Intercommunion, and about such steps as would be necessary to make this possible, such as recognition of Anglican orders. But I think we can make too much of this issue. When I read of a speaker - Anglican or otherwise - talking about the "pain" of being present in a church and not being able to make his communion with others present, I wonder how severe this pain is and whether he ought to see a doctor about it. It is, of course, sad that Christians of different denominations cannot receive the Body and Blood of Christ in each other's churches; but there are many other ways in which they can "assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that they have received at God's hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul". (Book of Common Prayer: Morning Prayer, Invitation). "The heart of full communion", says the report of the Anglican Consultative Council, "is sacramental fellowship; but there are new depths of fellowship in Christ ever to be explored and new ways of working together" (p.1). These "new ways" could include all kinds of non-eucharistic worship, joint retreats and Bible classes, and indeed anything which would bring Anglicans and Roman Catholics together to "seek for the Lord while he may be found" and to grow in depths of understanding and wonder. United action of this kind ought, surely, by now to have become quite natural and normal; but, in fact, it has not, and in some places there are signs of withdrawal into our own shells as being the only places where we feel safe.

(2) That we should try to get a union of Relief Societies which are concerned with the welfare of the world. It seems to me utterly wrong that there should be two parallel societies - one called Christian Aid and the other called The Catholic Fund for Overseas Development - which are really doing the same work, but which cannot, apparently, work together except on very rare occasions. This is where Macquarrie's plea for "secular ecumenism" comes in, for no doctrinal points are at issue. Maybe the more Protestant elements in Christian Aid would find it hard to work with Roman Catholics, and vice versa; but could not this Commission act as a kind of go-between or reconciler to bring both sides together?

There is no doubt that an amalgamation of Christian resources of this kind would be warmly welcomed by the younger people, who would rejoice to see the Christian community - which claims to be ruled by service and compassion - getting something done regardless of their different theologies. They would see this as a sign that the business of Unity was not just a game - like (shall we say?) Monopoly - played by professional theologians and ecumenists - but part of a deep concern for the poor, the outcast, the

underprivileged, the unwanted of the world.

(3) That we should try to get rid of some of our fears and prejudices. Why are we so afraid of each other? so timid, so suspicious? so ignorant? Vatican II has led us into a new world so far as Rome and the rest of Christendom is concerned. Yet we are still shackled by the memory of attitudes and postures which should have no place in a Pilgrim Church seeking to maintain the cause of Christ in a hostile and disillusioned world.

I think one of the duties of this Commission is to try to get both our Churches to launch a vast programme of mutual education, something which might well pave the way for much greater mutual trust. There is still a great deal of ignorance to overcome. A year or two ago I listened to an Anglican speaker from India - the head of a college of some kind. When asked of what religion his students were, he replied (so far as I remember): "We have a few Christians of various denominations, but the rest are all Hindus or Catholics". No doubt similar stories could be told about Roman Catholic speakers, for there is still far too much ignorance and misunderstanding of each other's position. And, in spite of the new atmosphere and the new relationships which have come about as a result of Vatican II, I still find, among Anglicans, a good deal of suspicion about Rome - a feeling that Rome is not to be trusted, or that she is only out for power, or that her particular brand of Christianity is so remote from that of the New Testament that you can't hope ever to come to terms with it. When I talk to people about the changes which I know are taking place in the Church of Rome, I am often met with a tolerant smile, which is as much as to say: "Poor soul! How easily some people get taken in!"

It is no good leaving this mutual education to individuals, to the few who care. We need a programme worked out in each country where Anglicans and Romans are living together, and then laid before the Churches by the highest authorities and made a matter of duty, of obligation, if this question of unity is going to be taken seriously.

As I look round, I seem to be aware of a terrible feeling of either stagnation, or complacency or despair. Everyone is afraid - afraid of losing power, or prestige, or what is called "face". Hopes are raised, only to be dashed on the rocks of indifference or suspicion.

Look at the Malta Report which commended:

Annual joint meetings of hierarchies.

Constant consultation between committees concerned with pastoral and evangelistic problems.

Agreements for joint use of churches and other buildings.

Agreements to share facilities for theological education

Exchange of preachers even at the Eucharist.

Joint statements by Church leaders on great issues.

That was three and a half years ago; and yet, in many parts of the world, scarcely one of these things has been implemented or even seriously discussed. This is very discouraging, making one wonder whether those who pay lip-service to the idea of Christian unity really care much about it, or realise that it cannot be achieved without paying a high price.

I think, therefore, that there are certain things which could be done, and which must be done, if we are going to make any progress towards the unity which it is our responsibility to promote. I would like us, at this session of our Commission, to send a really strong letter to the Archbishop and the Pope, expressing our regret that so little has been done, and pleading for the help that only they can give in getting much greater co-operation between our Churches.

We are living at present in the era of dialogue, of discussion, of the conference, the consultation, the round-table talks. But how long is this going to last? When are people going to see some fruit of our discussions, some positive and imaginative steps? It is not enough to publish theological statements and working-papers. It is time to press for action, for deeds not words. Let us take the title of the report of the Anglican Consultative Council as our motto: The Time is Now.