

Archbishop of Canterbury on Vatican Response

The Vatican's Dec. 5 response to the Final Report of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission "is another significant step along the road toward visible unity of the church," said Anglican Archbishop George Carey of Canterbury in a statement on the response. He welcomed the "tone and warmth of the response" and said the Vatican's criticisms "may be seen as a constructive evaluation." He added, however, that in the Vatican's response to the question posed to it — Are the agreements contained in the Final Report consonant with the faith of the Roman Catholic Church/Anglican Communion? — the question "appears to have been understood as asking, 'Is the Final Report identical with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church?'" Carey said that "if either communion requires that the other conform to its own theological formulations, further progress will be hazardous." His statement follows.

Today I have received from Cardinal Edward Cassidy of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, on behalf of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, the response from the Roman Catholic Church to the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission of September 1981. It is now my intention to offer the response to the churches of the Anglican Communion for study, reflection and comment along with this personal reflection.

Roman Catholics and Anglicans alike will appreciate that this response is another significant step along the road toward visible unity of the church which is our Lord's will. The dialogue between our two communions began in 1967 following a joint decision by Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey during their meeting at Rome in March 1966. The succeeding years of serious dialogue have been a pilgrimage of repentance for the alienation of the past, of joy for the mutual rediscovery of our common heritage of faith and of thanksgiving for the progress made. In

this journey together we have been sustained by the resolution expressed in the report of the joint preparatory commission and repeated in the Preface to the Final Report, which called for "a resolve for a future in which our common aim would be the restoration of full organic unity." This same resolve was echoed in the final words of the conclusion, which talked of "high expectations that significant initiatives will be boldly undertaken to deepen our reconciliation and lead us forward in the quest for the full communion to which we have been committed, in obedience to God, from the beginning of our dialogue."

"Humility is required of both communions so that, having distanced themselves from some of the more polarized language and theological formulations of the past, they may discover new possibilities through the Spirit of God."

I appreciate the care and the time taken in the formulation of this response, which is an indication of the seriousness with which the Roman Catholic Church regards the fruits of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. I welcome the tone and warmth of the response which affirms the very considerable agreement which has been achieved, especially in the areas of the eucharist and ministry and on ordination. The response recognizes that the degree of doctrinal unity that this represents is the bedrock for our mutual confidence that further progress is possible. For that reason the criticisms which are offered may be seen as a constructive evaluation by the Roman Catholic Church of the Final Report offered in a spirit of love. In that same spirit I offer a personal reflection on this response.

Both communions were asked

the same question: Are the agreements contained in the Final Report consonant with the faith of the Roman Catholic Church/Anglican Communion? At the 1988 Lambeth Conference it was my privilege to present the Final Report on behalf of the primates and to move the related motion, which was overwhelmingly carried. We recognized that not everything in the report was expressed in the terms, language, thought forms and even theology of the 39 Articles and the Book of Common Prayer. Nevertheless we believed that the documents on the eucharist and on ministry and ordination were "consonant" with the faith of the church as expressed within the Anglican Communion. In the case of the Roman Catholic response, however, the question to our two communions appears to have been understood instead as asking: Is the Final Report identical with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church? The argument of the response suggests that a difference in methodology may have led to this approach. If either communion requires that the other conform to its own theological formulations, further progress will be hazardous. Humility is required of both communions so that, having distanced themselves from some of the more polarized language and theological formulations of the past, they may discover new possibilities through the Spirit of God. These possibilities remain open to us since the response itself is part of a dialogue which must be continued and developed.

I am encouraged that the Roman Catholic Church, like the Anglican Communion, remains unreservedly committed to the pursuit of unity in faith and in common life. ☒