

ARCIC-II 48/1 (85)



SECRETARIATUS
AD CHRISTIANORUM UNITATEM FOVENDAM

E Civitate Vaticana, die July 13, 1985

Prot. N. 3470/85/a
(In responsione fiat mentio huius numeri.)

To the co-chairmen of ARCIC-II
The Rt Revd Mark Santer
The Rt Revd Cormac Murphy-O'Connor

Your Excellencies,

As you prepare for this year's meeting of the second Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission, the fact that the Commission is drawing near to the conclusion of its first major study on "Church and Salvation" prompts me to write to you concerning an important aspect of your future programme.

In their Common Declaration of May 29th, Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Runcie summarised the new Commission's task in words that are very familiar to you. The second of the three points set before the Commission for the continuation of the work already begun, always in the light of our two Communions' respective judgements on the Final Report of ARCIC-I, is "to study all that hinders the mutual recognition of the ministries of our two Communions".

Of the many questions involved in this study, including that of the ordination of women to the priesthood in some Churches of the Anglican Communion, it is well known that the most fundamental and deeply-felt issue relates to the judgement of the Roman Catholic Church upon the validity of Anglican ordinations.

In the light of some recent discussions between the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, I would ask you to draw the attention of the members of the Commission to certain aspects of the Roman Catholic Church's position in this respect. I do so in the hope that this will assist the Commission in planning the next stages of its work.

The Secretariat is well aware that the Commission has no intention of examining the question of Anglican ordinations in isolation from other issues. ARCIC-II maintains, rightly, that the mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministries can be properly studied only as a part, a vital part, of the whole process of reconciliation between our Communions. Thus you already intend your study to be in the context of your more general work on "Growth in Reconciliation".



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Again, the Secretariat knows and shares the view of the Commission that such a study cannot be a purely historical one, whether of the events of the sixteenth century or of the circumstances in which Leo XIII's Bull Apostolicae Curae was prepared and promulgated. History cannot be ignored but, like its predecessor, ARCIC-II is concerned "to discover each other's faith as it is today and to appeal to history only for enlightenment" (cf. ARCIC-I, Final Report, Preface, p.1).

Leo XIII's decision rested on a doctrinal basis, a judgement that the doctrine concerning eucharist and priesthood expressed in and indeed controlling the composition of the Anglican Ordinal of 1552 was such as to lead to defects both in the sacramental form and in the intention which the rite itself expressed. Because of this he maintained that the rite in the Ordinal could not be considered an adequate means for the conferring of the Sacrament of Order. Thus his decision that the orders thus conferred were invalid rested above all on what he described as the "nativa indoles ac spiritus" ("native character and spirit") of the Ordinal as a whole.

Pope Leo saw this "nativa indoles" as indicated by the deliberate omission from the 1552 Ordinal of all references to some of the principal axes of Catholic teaching concerning the relationship of the Eucharist to the sacrifice of Christ and to the consequences of this for a true understanding of the nature of the Christian priesthood. He judged such omissions to reflect a denial of these essentials of Catholic teaching.

Since that decision, which expresses the position of the Catholic Church and which continues to govern its practice in conferring "absolute" ordination on former Anglican clergy who enter the communion of the Roman Catholic Church and seek to serve it in the priesthood, there have been a number of important developments.

On the one hand this century has seen a remarkable process of liturgical renewal in both our Communion. In the Roman Catholic Church this has led to the promulgation of new rites of ordination in the Pontificale Romanum of Pope Paul VI. In the Anglican Communion many

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member-Churches have introduced new Ordinals, while at the same time retaining some use of that of 1552-1662. In all this we see reflected some-thing of the theological developments in both Communions since the time of Apostolicae Curae.

On the other hand, the dialogue of the last twenty years with the furtherance of which you are so intimately concerned, has produced statements and elucidations on the Eucharist and on the Ministry which, with the rest of ARCIC-I's Final Report, are now the object of profound study, by both our Communions as each seeks, in accordance with its own procedures, to determine the extent to which it can recognize therein the faith it professes.

ARCIC-I affirmed that, in its judgement, the consensus it has achieved put the issue of the Roman Catholic Church's judgement on Anglican Ordinations into a new context (cf. Ministry 17). Later it amplified this: "It believes that our agreement on the essentials of eucharistic faith with regard to the sacramental presence of Christ and of the sacrificial dimension of the eucharist, and on the nature and purpose of priesthood, ordination and apostolic succession, is the new context in which the question should now be discussed" (Eluc. Min. 6).

As the processes of evaluation proceed, the position of both Communions will become clearer. We look forward to the voicing of the consensus of the Anglican Communion when the bishops of that Communion gather for the Lambeth Conference in 1988, and the Roman Catholic Church will hope to be in a position to voice its final response at approximately that time. In the meantime you are well aware both of the reservations voiced in the Observations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1982, and of the responses, broadly positive but with indications of matters requiring further study, made public by some Roman Catholic Episcopal Conferences during the past year. So too you are aware of the first stages in Anglican responses, not least the full material provided in Towards a Church of England Response, discussed at the General Synod earlier this year. It is clear that there will be various calls for further study or further discussion on aspects of the Report, and it is to be hoped that such study and discussion will lead both Communions to greater clarity and to a deepening both of shared faith and of mutual reassurance.



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If at the end of this process of evaluation the Anglican Communion as such is able to state formally that it professes the same faith concerning essential matters where doctrine admits no difference and which the Roman Catholic Church also affirms are to be believed and held concerning the Eucharist and the Ordained Ministry, the Roman Catholic Church would acknowledge the possibility that in the context of such a profession of faith the text of the Ordinal might no longer retain that "nativa indoles" which was at the basis of Pope Leo's judgement. This is to say that, if both Communions were so clearly at one in their faith concerning the Eucharist and the Ministry, the context of this discussion would indeed be changed.

In that case such a profession of faith could open the way to a new consideration of the Ordinal (and of subsequent rites of ordination introduced in Anglican Churches), a consideration that could lead to a new evaluation by the Catholic Church of the sufficiency of these Anglican rites as far as concerns future ordinations. Such a study would be concerned with the rites in themselves, prescinding at this stage from the question of the continuity in the apostolic succession of the ordaining bishop.

In our view, such a possibility (even though one could not yet foretell with any certainty the outcome of such a study) could do much to assist the climate of the whole discussion. The explicit profession of one faith in Eucharist and Ministry, together with the possible positive effects of such a profession on the Roman Catholic Church's evaluation of the Anglican formularies of ordination, would be the strongest possible stimulus to find ways to overcome the difficulties which still hinder a mutual recognition of ministries, those hindrances which ARCIC-II is commissioned to study.

Through you, the co-chairmen, I take this occasion of greeting all the members of ARCIC-II and of thanking them for the work they have done and are doing. It is my earnest prayer that God will richly bless the Commission's work and guide its efforts to render possible that restoration of full communion which is our common goal and our common hope.

Yours sincerely in Christ,


Johannes Card. Willebrands