

Anglican-Roman Catholic
International Commission

14th January, 1986

Your Eminence,

As Co-Chairmen of the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC-II), we were very happy to receive your letter of 13th July on the question of the reconciliation of ministries and in particular on the questions posed by the judgement of the Roman Catholic Church on the validity of Anglican ordinations. We were also grateful to you for allowing us to discuss your letter and the perspectives which it opens with the members of the Commission at their recent meeting at Graymoor in New York State.

Your letter was, in fact, especially helpful and timely and we would like in our reply to indicate our reasons for saying this. The Roman Catholic Church's negative verdict on the validity of Anglican Orders was, as you say, based on a judgement that the doctrine concerning eucharist and priesthood presupposed by the Anglican Ordinal of 1552 embodied defects both in the sacramental form and in the intention which the Rite itself expressed. This judgement, set out in the Encyclical Apostolicae Curae of 1896 confirmed previous practice and has shaped the Roman Catholic perception of Anglican Orders ever since. It is a judgement that has coloured the manifold relations between our Churches. In particular, it is the background to the Roman Catholic Church's current discipline which allows admission of Anglicans to communion only in very restricted circumstances. In countries where our two traditions live side by side, we are aware of the acute pastoral problems

that this situation poses. It is very acutely felt in those families where one spouse is a Roman Catholic and the other an Anglican. People in this situation bear a large share of the pain of Christian disunity and their longing to share a common sacramental life is deep and urgent. But the pain is also felt more widely in groups and in local communities where a shared Christian life is already experienced.

In your letter you have pin-pointed the way in which the ARCIC process beckons us forward out of this situation and points the way towards its resolution. The members of ARCIC-I submitted to their authorities statements on the eucharist and ministry which in their judgement represented substantial agreement on matters on which doctrine admits of no divergence. A process is now under way whereby the authorities of both Churches are being asked to say whether they find their faith concerning eucharist and ministry adequately expressed in these agreed statements. It may be that the authorities of our two Churches will feel the need for further elucidation of the statements before coming to a final conclusion. If they do, the present Commission will address itself urgently to their questions.

If at the end of this process the authorities of our two communions are able, on the basis of the statements agreed by ARCIC-I, to recognise one another as holding the same faith concerning eucharist and ministry, they will confirm the judgement of our predecessors in ARCIC-I that we now have a new context for discussion of the mutual recognition of ministries.

In that case, the problem at the heart of Apostolicae Curae, namely the need for a common faith concerning eucharist and ministry, would be resolved. That resolution would furnish us with a clear perspective with which to view the Ordinals used by our two communions. It would also require us to confront all the practical questions that would be raised in the situation of restored communion.

The Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission is already addressing itself to the questions that we foresee emerging as this process unfolds. In particular, we acknowledge that our deliberations must take account of the fact of the ordination of women to the priesthood in some parts of the Anglican communion. We realise that this development creates a fresh and grave obstacle to reconciliation of ministries, an obstacle which is held to be bound up with the doctrine of ministry. Nonetheless, our confidence and hope for the successful outcome of our work is rooted in our experience of reconciliation already achieved between our two Churches, in our growing trust in each other's integrity, and in the grace of God.

It was against the background of this growing faith and confidence that Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Donald Coggan spoke of our goal as "the restoration of complete communion in faith and sacramental life" (Common Declaration 29 April 1977). The implications of this statement are profound. We seek not only to be able to recognize one another as professing the same catholic and apostolic faith. We look forward not only to sharing the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood at one altar. We also desire to witness to that faith together

and together to manifest in the world our shared life in Christ. This will require us to build upon the convergence on the nature and exercise of authority in the Church which was achieved by our predecessors.

Our goal is full ecclesial communion. We agree with ARCIC-I that "unity is of the essence of the Church, and since the Church is visible its unity also must be visible. Full visible communion between our two Churches cannot be achieved without mutual recognition of sacraments and ministry, together with the common acceptance of a universal primacy, at one with the episcopal college in the service of koinonia" (Final Report, Introduction p.8).

Finally we wish to thank your Eminence for your care, your concern and your prayers for our work, knowing that in seeking the unity of Christ's people, we are seeking to do his will, and remembering the promise to which St. Paul bears witness: "Faithful is he who calls, who will also perform it" (1 Thess. 5:24).

Yours sincerely in the love of Christ,

+ Mark Santer

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Bishop of Kensington.

+ Cormac Murphy-O'Connor

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