

ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC JOINT PREPARATORY COMMISSION

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"TIME FOR DIALOGUE"

by

The Bishop of Ripon  
(the Right Revd. J.R.H. Moorman)

I have been asked to say something to you today on the subject of "Why Dialogue is now possible". In so doing, I can give only my own reasons for thinking that this is an appropriate time in which to discuss our differences and to share our hopes. I suspect that there are some Anglicans who still feel that any talk of union between Rome and Canterbury is a waste of time, since the dogmatic and ecclesiological differences between us are so great that reconciliation is out of the question. There are probably also some Roman Catholics who would feel the same. But I believe that this is a form of defeatism, of despair, which does not make sufficient allowance for the strength of the Holy Spirit of God. "With God", said our Lord, "all things are possible"; and, since Christ himself prayed that all might be one, we must suppose that he believed this to be possible under the guidance and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

It is, therefore, in a spirit of hopefulness, of confidence - not in our wisdom but in the wisdom of God, and in his over-ruling power - that I want to suggest three reasons why I think it right that dialogue between our two Churches - or our two portions of the one Church of God - should be inaugurated.

I ( ) The first reason is that we have gone on long enough in our separate compartments.

It is now 433 years since the English Parliament passed the Second Act of Succession (in 1534), the last of the series which separated the Ecclesia Anglicana from allegiance to the See of Rome.

We need not go into the details of this. The causes were complicated and controversial, and were not unconnected with the general condition of the Western Church at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the temper of the English people, the amours of Henry VIII and the politics of Clement VII. Suffice it to say that in 1534 the breach with Rome was complete, and the Church in England (from which the Anglican Communion in all parts of the world takes its origin) had become an independent, non-papal but still (in its own eyes) catholic and apostolic part of the One Church of Christ.

This breach with Rome, however, was not final, since 19 years later full communion between the two Churches was restored for a short period. The act which made the breach final was performed, not by anyone in England but by Pius V, who in 1570 staged a mock "trial" of Queen Elizabeth in Rome, pronounced her guilty of heresy, and proceeded to excommunicate her and dispense all her subjects from their oath of allegiance.

The year 1570, therefore, marks the end of the negotiations with the Holy See which had begun 43 years earlier when Henry VIII made his approach to Rome about the possibility of obtaining an annulment of his (canonically illegal) marriage to Katharine of Aragon.

In the instructions issued by the Holy Office in 1949, the bishops were told "to pay special attention to the manner in which the story of the Reformation is presented, and to take a firm stand against any exaggeration of shortcomings on the Catholic side coupled with a glossing over of the Reformers' errors".

I have no wish to adopt the opposite attitude, namely of suggesting that it is wrong to exaggerate the shortcomings of the Reformers while glossing over the errors of the Papacy. All I want to do is to try and make sure that we all realize that the Breach with Rome was the result of a failure in negotiations and not just an act of insubordination performed by an angry and uxorious monarch, and still less a rebellion carried out by a nation demanding religious freedom and ecclesiastical reform.

One has often in the past heard Roman Catholic speakers describing the Breach with Rome as a "walk out". But this does not give an accurate picture of what really happened. For this reason, I am sure the Council Fathers were right to change the phrase in chapter iii of the Decree on Oecumenism so that the Western non-Roman Churches are now said to "be separated" (seiunctae sunt) and not described as having "separated themselves" (se seiunxerunt). In making this change the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, who were in charge of the draft, accepted the two reasons which were adduced, (a) that no suggestion of blame should be involved, and (b) that the revised form is historically more accurate.

Ecclesia Anglicana and Sancta Romana Ecclesia "seiunctae sunt" for nearly 400 years, during which no serious attempt has been made to heal the breach. It is true that, early in the 18th century, Archbishop Wake engaged in correspondence with Dr. du Pin of the Sorbonne, and that in the present century Lord Halifax and others held conversations with the Abbé Portal and Cardinal Mercier - but these were unofficial and private ventures by individuals. Officially the two Churches have remained separated for nearly four centuries.

II My second reason is that the Roman attitude towards the problem of Christian Unity has changed so much in the last five years.

It is very important for us Anglicans to remember that, whereas we think of Christian Unity as a coming together of Churches which are separated from each other, Rome thinks of it as a matter of other Churches coming in - into the fold from which, at some point, they became alienated.

Let me point to 3 different papal utterances, all of recent years:

- (i) 1943. Pius XII in Mystici Corporis (§ 102) after declaring that those outside the Roman fold needed to "extricate themselves from a state in which they cannot be sure of their own salvation", cried: "with open arms we await them, not as strangers but as those who are coming to their father's house".
- (ii) 1959. John XXIII in Ad Petri Cathedram (§ 58): "Observe, we beg of you, that when we lovingly invite you to the unity of the Church, we are inviting you not to the home of a stranger but to your own, your Father's house".
- (iii) 1964. Paul VI in sending greetings to the world said: "Greetings and peace to the whole Anglican Church while with sincere charity, and also hope, we look forward to see it one day honourably take up its place with the sole and universal fold of Christ"  
(Pope Paul and Christian Unity, p.79).

Such is, and always has been, the official attitude of the Roman Church towards those not in communion with her. So far as the Anglican Communion is concerned, the Church of Rome has always regarded it as one of those bodies which stand outside the true fold and its members, therefore, (in the words of Pius XII) "uncertain of their own salvation".

At no point has the intransigence of the Roman Catholic Church shown itself more forcibly than in the bull Apostolicae Curae of Leo XIII, which declared that "ordinations performed according to the Anglican rite are utterly invalid and altogether void" - a statement which has been described as "one of the sharpest and most public rebuffs that the Church of Rome can ever have administered to a peaceful Christian communion" (G.K.A. Bell, Christian Unity, p.68).

The climate has not, therefore, been conducive to dialogue; and, in creating this climate, both sides have been to blame. The difficulties and alienations have been much increased by political and racial issues, by persecutions and martyrdoms (carried out by both Churches), and by a great deal of "envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness".

But in the last five years things have changed and a wholly new climate has arisen. The pontificate of Pope John XXIII and the holding of the Second Vatican Council have together released a great deal of emotion and aspiration which had been stifled and confined for many years. While Christians of other allegiances were busy with their conversations and plans, and were getting to know and trust one another, the Roman Catholic Church was condemned to remain in isolation. "The Catholic Church", said the Holy Office in 1949 (the year after the formation of the World Council of Churches) - "the Catholic Church takes no part in 'ecumenical' conferences or meetings". But, although the official policy of the Church was to stand aloof from the whole ferment of what was going on in the rest of the Christian world, many of its members were deeply disturbed and distressed, longing for opportunities for discussion and co-operation, for the exercise of Christian tolerance and understanding, and for some show of charity and humility.

The Council, by opening the lock gates, has released an immense weight of hope and expectation which is now spreading all over the world. All of us here could, I imagine, produce ample evidence of this from our own experiences. The Council must, therefore, be accepted as an event of immense ecumenical importance.

Consider, inter alia, the following points:

(a) In the Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) great care is taken not to identify either the Body of Christ or the Kingdom of God with the Roman Catholic Church. Trent and Vatican I had explicitly stated that the Church which is in communion with Rome is the only true Church; and Pius XII in 1950 had stated that "the Mystical Body of Christ and the Catholic Church in communion with Rome are one and the same thing" (Humani Generis, §27). It would have been natural for Vatican II to have upheld this point of view. In the earlier drafts of the Constitution this was in fact done; but in the final draft we read:

"This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church which is governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth may be found outside its visible structure", (§ 8).

This change from a categorical est to the phrase subsistit in is of great significance. It suggests that the Church of God cannot be pinned down too closely, that it may be something bigger than the Roman Catholic Church since much that is true and holy may be found outside it. As Gregory Baum says: "The Body of Christ is present in the Catholic Church, but at the same time, without losing its historical and incarnate character, transcends it".

(b) Having recognized this fact, the Constitution goes on to acknowledge the existence of other Christians, not just (as the Revd. Victor de Waal says) as "wanderers in the twilight" but as members of communities which the Council does not hesitate to describe as "Churches". It also has a

good deal to say about Baptism as incorporation into Christ and, therefore, as conferring membership of the Mystical Body. For example, in De Oecumenismo, "Men who believe in Christ, and have been properly baptized, are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church". Or again: "All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they, therefore, have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church". This means that, whereas Mystici Corporis (1943) could say that only those in communion with Rome were real members of the Church, we can now say that only such are full members of the Church.

(c) There runs through the Decrees and Constitutions of the Council a note of penitence which is very much lacking in previous papal and official utterances. The inspiration behind this lies in the courageous words of Pope Paul VI at the opening of the Second Session of the Council in 1963. Addressing the Observers, he spoke of the "inexpressible consolation and reasonable hope" which their presence gave to him as well as the "deep sadness we feel at their prolonged separation".

"If we are in any way to blame for that separation", he said, "we humbly beg God's forgiveness, and ask pardon too of our brethren who feel themselves to have been injured by us. For our part, we willingly forgive the injuries which the Catholic Church has suffered, and forget the grief endured during the long series of dissensions and separations".

These words are echoed in the Constitution on the Church which at one point declares: "In humble prayer we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive them that trespass against us". This acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church of some responsibility for the divisions among Christians is one of the most important features of the Council. It is sad that there has, so far as I know, been no corresponding expression of regret from our side.

(d) Throughout the whole corpus of conciliar legislation the ecumenical theme constantly appears. We find it most noticeably in the Constitution on the Church (especially, but by no means solely, in the passage which deals with Christians of other denominations) and in the Decrees on Ecumenism, on the Eastern Churches and on Religious Liberty; but it is to be found also in the Decrees on the Church's Missionary Activity, on Priestly Formation, (16), and on the Life and Ministry of a Priest, (9), on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, (16), on the Religious Life, (2), and on the Apostolate of the Laity, (27). True to the directives given to the Council by John XXIII, the ecumenical aspect of its work was never lost sight of.

(e) The negative gains in that the Council avoided legislation or declarations which might have created new barriers between Rome and the rest of the Christian world or caused offence and irritation. It is generally known that many of the Council fathers would have liked new dogmas about our Lady; and those of us who were present at the Council saw the battle being fought between those who wanted new titles to be bestowed upon her and those who wished any statement about her to be based upon biblical and patristic sources rather than upon popular devotion. Or again, previous Councils had assumed that it was their duty not only to proclaim what they believed right, but also to anathematize those who adopted any other point of view. The published documents of Vatican II do not, I think, contain anywhere the word "anathema", nor do I recollect any speech in which the subject of anathematization was so much as mentioned.

There is, then, no doubt that, ecumenically, the Council has made a great advance, and has brought the Roman Catholic Church into the heart of the debate which has for a good many years occupied so much of the time and thought and prayer of other Churches.

But we are concerned here especially with the relations between the Roman Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion. It would, perhaps, have been understandable if the Council, while laying down certain principles to govern future relations between Rome and other Christians, had avoided mention of any particular Church. But, in fact, the Anglican Communion comes in for special commendation in the Decree on Ecumenism, and this in spite of the fact that, to a great many of the bishops, the subject must have been one of which they had had very little experience. [It is interesting to remember that more than one third of the Council membership was made up of bishops from Italy, Spain, Mexico and Brazil.]

In its first form the schema on Ecumenism did not make any reference to the Anglican Communion; but, in the debate towards the end of November 1963, a number of speakers spoke in high praise of Anglicanism and asked that special mention should be made of it. As a result, in the form of the decree presented to the Council in 1964, in speaking of the separated Churches of the West, reference was made to the fact that "among those in which catholic traditions and institutions in part continue to exist, the Anglican Communion stands first" (praeeminet). This was later changed to "occupies a special place", with a view, so we were told, not to offend the members of the Old Catholic Church.

This is a remarkable statement. Why, one may ask, should the Council go out of its way to pay this tribute to a Church which, to so many of the fathers, must have been practically unknown? The answer, I think, lies in the fact that:

- (i) a number of speakers, mostly French, had pointed out that Anglicanism was, in many ways, different from Western Protestantism, and therefore needed a separate approach.
- (ii) there was a feeling among some of the bishops that Anglicanism had had a rather raw deal from Leo XIII in Apostolicae Curae and from some subsequent pontiffs.
- (iii) very good relations were built up with the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (who were in charge of this schema) by the Archbishop of Canterbury having a personal representative in Rome from 1961 onwards.
- (iv) by and large, Romans and Anglicans talk in the same language and think in the same terms.

I have a feeling that a good many Roman Catholics believe that if there is to be some kind of union with the Western Churches, perhaps along the lines of the Uniat Churches, the Anglican Communion might well be the body with which to begin.

III My third task is to look at the prospect of dialogue from the point of view of the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican Church has always realized that no plan for Christian unity could omit or ignore the Roman Catholic Church. Anglicans have held to this belief in the face of considerable opposition from members of other Reformed Churches who feel that any dealings with Rome would be fraught with untold danger.

"Protestant churchmen in foreign countries", wrote George Bell in 1948, "often find it difficult to understand how loyal and intelligent members of the Church of England can conceive it possible to have relations with the Church of Rome. What are called Jesuits-in-disguise or crypto-papists may (they suppose) capture key posts in the Anglican Church in order in the end to place it under the heel of the Pope. But such, on their own showing, are traitors and perjurers. The notion that a loyal churchman, who is in no danger of conversion to Rome, and rejects Rome's claims, should yet be willing

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to think of a rapprochement - this is what baffles and perplexes many a Protestant abroad" (Christian Unity, p.58).

Nevertheless, the Anglican fathers have always felt that, distant and daunting though it may be, the goal of unity, which must include the Church of Rome, should not be finally abandoned. This comes out in the reports of the successive Lambeth Conferences - the nearest which we can find to the expression of a common mind in the Anglican Communion.

At the first Lambeth Conference, in 1867, the fathers did no more than warn their faithful against the "growing superstitions and additions with which, in these latter days, the truth of God hath been overlaid ... especially by the pretension to universal sovereignty over God's heritage asserted for the See of Rome".

The second Conference, in 1878, was even more dispirited, having had to face the declaration of Papal Infallibility by the Vatican Council of 1870.

In 1888 the fathers "with deep regret felt that, under present circumstances, it was useless to consider the question of Reunion with our brethren of the Roman Church", but in 1897, in spite of Apostolicae Curae, they felt that things were getting a little better.

By 1908 the spirit of hopefulness had increased to such an extent that the Conference was able to declare that "there can be no fulfilment of the Divine Purpose in any scheme of reunion which does not ultimately include the great Latin Church of the West, with which our history has been so closely associated in the past, and to which we are still bound by many ties of common faith and tradition".

In 1920 the report quotes with approval these important words and adds: "Should the Church of Rome at any time desire to discuss conditions of reunion we shall be ready to welcome such discussions". They then referred to certain signs indicative of a change of atmosphere, and concluded by saying: "It is obvious that no forward step can be taken yet; but the facts thus referred to may help to create in the future a very different position".

The subsequent Lambeth Conferences (1930, 1948 and 1958) felt dispirited by the failure of the Malines Conversations, the publication of Mortalium Animos, and the refusal of so many Roman Catholics to join in common enterprises for the well-being of mankind. Nevertheless, the 1958 Report still nourishes some hope. "We feel certain", it says, "that Anglicans for their part, while striving at all times for the promotion of truth, frankness and just dealing between Christians, will wish to do all in their power to secure understanding with Roman Catholics, as part of their efforts to promote peace and unity among all Christian people".

In the meanwhile, faced with barriers so formidable and so forbidding, the Anglican Church has naturally been drawn in the other direction, into co-operation and discussion with other Reformed Churches and, to some extent, with the Orthodox Churches of the East. In their dealings with Protestantism, both British and Continental, they have found the prospects more hopeful and more congenial. They have been brought into contact with men who, like themselves, believed not that certain parts of the one and only Church had split off at the time of the Reformation but that the whole Church had disintegrated. There was no question here of one Church wanting to absorb other Churches or demanding submission. Though representing very different traditions, they met on equal terms and were able to discuss their differences round the table in an atmosphere of fraternity and equality.

Out of their deliberations a good deal is beginning to emerge, though some of it more slowly than many would wish. In 1947 four Anglican dioceses in South India became detached from the Anglican Communion in order to become part of a united Church which included Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Schemes and plans for unions on this, or on some similar, pattern have been produced in North India, Ceylon, parts of Africa,



Australia, Canada, the United States and elsewhere. In Britain two series of conversations are progressing at the same time, one with the Methodists and one with the Presbyterians.

As these plans gradually take shape, much hope is generated of a number of unions being brought about within the next few years. This hope was expressed in the resolution, passed by a large majority at the Nottingham Conference in 1964, that all the member Churches of the British Council of Churches should strive to reach some form of organic unity by 1980.

Not all Anglicans are very happy about this policy; and in fact the Anglican Communion finds itself faced with a considerable dilemma at the present moment.

Three possibilities present themselves:

- (i) Recognizing the grave difficulties in the way of any kind of union with Rome, to plunge further and further into schemes of reunion which are reaching maturity, believing that these are in accordance with the will of God and will eventually contribute to greater unity in the years to come.
- (ii) Conscious of the differences which exist between Anglicanism and other Reformed Churches, to concentrate on drawing together the Anglican Communion in a greater self-consciousness. This policy received considerable support at the Toronto Congress in 1963 and is being implemented in the projects which come under the heading of "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence".
- (iii) Realizing that, as the Lambeth fathers have constantly said, no scheme of reunion can ignore the "great Latin Church of the West", to exercise some caution over other plans for reunion and explore the possibilities of dialogue with Rome. Not very much is said or written about this; but I have some reason for believing that a growing number of Anglicans are reluctant to support plans for union which might make more difficult some kind of union with Rome. Plans for merging episcopal with non-episcopal ministries, for devising new forms of ordinal, for reconciling Eucharistic teaching of great diversity, are obviously beset by great difficulties, and the fear is sometimes expressed that, in trying to accommodate members of (for example) a Calvinistic tradition, irreparable damage might be done to the cause of reunion with the "great Latin Church of the West".

It is therefore with hope and expectation that I have come here today to take part in these conversations, the first official meeting between our two portions of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ for over 400 years.