

Roma May 20, 1978

Prot. No. 1613 /78

The Right Revd. John W. A. HOWE  
Secretary General  
Anglican Consultative Council  
32 Eccleston Street  
LONDON SW1W 9PY

41  
22 MAY 1978

Dear Bishop Howe,

thankyou for your reply to my letter.

I must begin by saying that, however the latter was expressed, it was not my intention, in your own words, to 'introduce any suggestion of secrecy'. My problems were entirely with paragraph 6 of the paper from Versailles, in its present form without clarification. I quite appreciated the difficulties of changing the text which was agreed upon by the consultation, but the fact remains that both the Cardinal and I regarded paragraph 6 as open to a misinterpretation which was potentially seriously embarrassing to the Secretariat. To forestall this by some kind of explanatory note seemed essential to us.

I am afraid I cannot agree that this need is done away with simply by pointing out the limits of the authority of the paper. The Lambeth Conference is a very important event which this time, precisely in view of all the public discussion within and outside the Anglican communion about the ordination of women, will attract close press scrutiny, and the press is not much concerned with nice distinctions about the status of 'hot' documents which lend themselves to good headlines.

Hence I am convinced that some clarifying note about paragraph 6 must be included. When I considered how this might be achieved, I became aware of the complicating factor that Fr. Congar, who had unfortunately been unavoidably absent when the paper was finalised at Versailles, was himself unhappy about paragraph 6. He expressed his misgivings in a later conversation and the idea of some clarifying note by the Catholic participants was born of this conversation together with a proposal for its content.

The Catholic participants were invited in a carefully explanatory letter to agree to this: no pressure was brought to bear on them: it was simply pointed out that this was a possible way of ensuring the consultation achieving its purpose without provoking reactions which in the long run would prejudice Anglican/RC relations.

42  
1978

SECRETARIATUS  
AD CHRISTIANORUM UNITATEM FOVENDAM

CITTA DEL VATICANO

Roma

1613/78

Right Revd. John W. A. Howe ./. 2

z Fr Doyle  
via C.H.

I regret extremely that you should have learned of this proposal (which obviously would have been conveyed to you if and when completed) in such an improper way and one which, judged by the reported strength of your reaction, must have been incomplete and onesided. I am not myself wedded to the particular solution, and the main purpose of clarification would be as well achieved by some Secretariat note - but I am doubtful whether this would be fair to the participants who might then seem to be held up publicly to criticism.

With regard to the formula proposed for the qualifying note, I am not clear with what exactness this was conveyed to you but I should in any case like to make these points:

My impression is that the terms given to the consultation at Versailles were already somewhat abbreviated if not modified from those which were originally drafted by Canon Moore at the first informal talks. But, however that may be, the purpose of the consultation was certainly to discuss whether reconciliation in sacramental fellowship was possible between two churches retaining quite opposed positions on this matter, not to discuss whether such reconciliation is possible or likely by one side changing its position. It was in this sense that we wished to say that the interpretation of paragraph 6 to which objection is taken was ruled out by the consultation's terms of reference.

Since the consultation's question was first formulated for discussion, important steps have been taken on both sides and in particular the RC/Church's position on the ordination of women has been declared officially. It is not the business of the consultation to express itself on a connected question in a way which seems to call in question the seriousness of that declaration.

I have suggested to Fr. Duprey a modified formula which he might discuss with you. I hope the discussion may clear up misunderstandings which unfortunately are liable to multiply when we work at such distance apart and within somewhat different systems.

sincerely yours

+ Ramon Torr  
Vice-Presid

4 April 1978 43

The undersigned Catholic participants wish to make clear that paragraph 6 of this report is to be read in the light of paragraph 2 and 3.

Hence, as far as they are concerned, this paragraph is not intended to say that they regard the Catholic position rejecting the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood as transitory and destined to change.

Such an interpretation would, for that matter, be irrelevant to the precise terms of reference of the consultation, which were to examine the question "whether Churches with women priests and Churches without can be reconciled in sacramental fellowship".

Fr. Congar

Fr. Duprey

Fr. Hotchkin

Mons. W. A. Purdy