

THE UNITY WE SEEK

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1. Wondering Who 'We' Are

Perhaps I might begin with a word of warning. Whenever you hear someone using the word 'we', ask yourself three questions: To whom are they referring? To whom do they suppose themselves to be referring? To whom should they be referring? When the Archbishop invited me to speak to the topic 'The Unity We Seek', my heart sank. I knew from the start that it was not the word 'unity' which would give me the biggest problems, but the word 'we'. To whom are we referring when we speak of 'the unity we seek'? To whom do we suppose ourselves to be referring? To whom should we be referring? And one more question: For whose sake do we seek such unity as we do?

When Thomas Jefferson wrote 'We hold these truths ...', he spoke for a small and quite specific group of middle-class males in the American colonies. And yet, he believed that he and his colleagues in revolution were speaking and acting 'for the sake of' a far wider community; a community, indeed, whose boundaries could not, in principle, be drawn more narrowly than those of the human

race itself. In principle; in practice, however, he did not set his own slaves free.

In England today, it is quite common for groups of Anglicans and Roman Catholics, impatient at current disciplinary constraints on the practice of intercommunion, to appeal to the principle that 'the things which unite us are more important than those which divide us'. And this, indeed, is true. But it is worth asking who 'we' are of whom it is true. The things which unite such groups usually include a wide range of cultural, social and political interests, attitudes and activities. That people who read the same books and belong to the same golf club should find that they have much in common is neither surprising nor, in itself, deplorable. And yet, St. Paul might have had something to say about a yearning to share the Lord's supper expressed by people who (such are the divisions of British society) would never dream of offering 'secular' hospitality to most members of their own denomination. I am not moralising; to do so would be both arrogant and naive. I am merely indicating how difficult it is to prevent the rhetoric of political and religious confession from floating off in abstraction from the painful complexity of actual circumstance.

Christians are human beings, and questions concerning our unity as Christians may not, therefore, properly be considered in abstraction from consideration of whatever it is that we are doing, and saying, and suffering, and failing

to do, for the sake of the unity or redemption or reconciliation of the human race. It is only for the sake of the human that Christianity exists. Unlike most groups and movements and organisations (whether cultural or scientific, professional or political), the Church has no private or particular purposes, goals or interests, of its own. The Church exists solely for the sake of that Kingdom whose coming, for every creature, it is called to serve as herald and as sacrament.

Therefore, however particular the group or groups to whom the 'we' in my title might, from time to time, be taken directly to refer, the unity we seek as Christians may never be less than that uniting of all things in heaven and on earth which is God's plan for the fullness of time.

In the first of the four sections that follow, therefore, I shall comment (under the rubric that 'the kingdom comes first') on what it is to be a 'people' and to be, or hope to be, one people - in the presence of God. This will enable me, in the second section, to distinguish the requirements of Christian discipleship from the aims of ecumenism and to make some suggestions as to how we might imagine the unity we seek. I hope, in this way, to build up background for some personal reflections, in the last two sections, on where some things now stand between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church.

2. The Kingdom Comes First

I have never met a Jew who was in any doubt as to their Jewishness. But I have also seldom met a Jew who did not hesitate a little when asked to state exactly what it is that makes a Jew a Jew. Is it a matter of being, biologically, a member of a particular race? No, that won't do: not all Jews are ethnically Semites. Perhaps, then, Jewish identity is religious, rather than racial? This will not do either, because many Jews, intensely conscious of and loyal to their Jewish identity, neither subscribe to the beliefs, nor engage in the practices, that are associated with Jewish religion. And, anyway, some Jews are Christians.

I could go on. The point I wish to make is that Jewish identity is the identity neither of a 'race' nor of a 'religion' but of a people. And the factors which make for 'peopleness' are not easy to specify, even though few of us are in any doubt as to where, as human beings, we belong; as to which are the people and places we know to be our own.

The reason why the factors which make for 'peopleness' are not easy to specify is that 'becoming a people' is a matter of having a history; it is a matter of memories shared, things done and undergone in common; it is a matter of weaving, from a thousand fragments of symbol and association, a single tapestry of narrative. It is no accident that, in the rituals which celebrate and sustain Jewish identity, that identity should be declared in

autobiographical form, with everyone, in each generation, feeling that he personally came forth from Egypt.

Later on, I shall suggest that our understanding of the Church, of what it is that makes for Christian identity and oneness, would profit from the recognition that we are more like the parent-plant from which we sprang than we often appreciate. First, however, I want, in the light of my remarks about Jewish 'peopleness', to say a word about God's action as the making of a world into a place in which a people can dwell at peace. We call that place God's kingdom.

We can begin by asking: what are the factors constitutive of the identity or oneness of the human race? What it is that make human beings human? And here, the first step towards an answer is biological: to be human is to be a member of a particular species, the human species.

In the case of all other animals, that is the end of the matter (which is why my last sentence sounded tautologous). But we are curious animals which do not only breed and feed, and make social arrangements (as many other animals do). We also speak and consider, tell stories, construct cities and policies, make plots and pans. Our cultures form part of our nature.

The specific identity, or oneness, or unity, that we seek, as human beings, would be such that all members of the biological species which we are came to share in tranquillity a common life, common memory, common hope, and

common language. We call this seeking the quest for world peace. Divided as we are in life, and memory, and expectation, 'common humanity' is something that in significant measure we lack. Becoming human, becoming 'fully' human, realising our common humanity, is (or should be) the goal of our politics and the substance of our ethics. The unity of humankind is at once inheritance, responsibility and dream. Humankind, we might say, is a species that may yet hope to be a people.

The weaving of diverse and sometimes conflictual traditions into a common people-constituting narrative or tradition is a vastly complex, fragile, uncertain and risk-laden business. If the histories of modern India and of the United States afford one kind of illustration of this, the predicaments of South Africa, Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka afford another.

Ours is not an age in which utopias flourish. The agonising costliness of this century, the sense of a planet coming together, contracting, not into friendship but into impending chaos, has made it more likely that we despair of the possibility of becoming one people than that we should optimistically strive for or expect this outcome. And this, it seems to me, is where the Church comes in.

Consumerism, narcotics and the ravaging of non-renewable resources are symptoms of pessimism, expressions of the gathering conviction that we have no future. Against such bleak surrender, Christianity insists that there is no

darkness which can justify despair: that, in all circumstances, the prospect of humanness, of people-peace, is to be kept alive. Gethsemane is the image of the Christian insistence that it is despair, not prayerfulness, which is escapist.

On the other side, of course, Gethsemane is also the image of Christian resistance to presumption: resistance to the manifold forms of the illusion that we can draw straight lines - of law, or power, or information - from where we are to such peopleness or paradise as we seek. There are, however, no such lines, no fixed frameworks (and if there were our actions would lack the dignity and tragedy of freedom). We are destined by redeeming grace, not by inexorable nemesis. In the darkness of the garden there is neither detailed knowledge nor control of the outcome, but simply hope to be sustained and work to be undertaken.

The unity of humankind (I remarked earlier) is inheritance, responsibility and dream. The Christian form of that statement might be: the unity of humankind indwelt by God, its 'templeness', is gift, responsibility and promise. But, if this is true, then its truth must be exhibited in the common life, the humanness, of God's people. The Church, according to that marvellous opening paragraph of Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, exists in Christ as sacrament of intimate union with God and of unity for the whole human race. What I have been trying to suggest is that such sacramentality, such 'exhibition' of

God's future kingdom, is the antithesis of gnosticism or futurology. We are neither stargazers nor possessors of secret information. We are simply human beings who have been brought to acknowledge their responsibility to exhibit, 'already', the fact and possibility of that unity, that common peopleness, which is promised but 'not yet' achieved. And because the unity we seek in hope is not yet achieved, the forms of its fulfilment are not predictable.

In comparison with the topics I have touched on so far, ecumenism is small beer. It is true that we have no right, as Christians, to work for what we call 'Christian unity' (namely: the healing of those historically inherited divisions whose sinfulness we now mutually acknowledge) except in the context of, and as an aspect of, the exercise of our wider responsibility, as human beings, to work for the coming of the kingdom, the healing of the human race. Nevertheless, having hinted at the seamless web which links the different aspects of 'the unity we seek', I now want to move on to consider questions which more specifically concern the unity of the Church.

3. Pictures of Church and Kingdom

According to the Report For the Sake of the Kingdom, 'It is easy enough to say in general terms what the word "church" refers to. It denotes certain organized human communities or assemblies, taken either individually or collectively'.¹

1. For the Sake of the Kingdom, p.19.

That such organized assemblies are properly called 'church' I do not, of course, deny. But to take so tidy an empirical description as one's starting-point is dangerous, because it encourages juridical or organisational considerations to call the tune.

If being an organization is the first thing that we find it easy to say about the Church, then not only may we find it almost as easy to draw the wrong distinctions between 'inside' and 'outside' - between church and world, religion and politics, grace and sin (not, I hasten to add, that the Report in question falls into this trap) - but we may also find it difficult to discipline the clericalist illusion that full-time 'organizers' and 'assemblers' are the real Church (which would leave the great majority of Christians and would-be Christians, ill-organised and infrequently assembling as they are, in some kind of no-man's land).

As my remarks on peopleness and sacraments have probably made clear, I believe it important to begin at the other end, with the insistence that wherever God's kingdom begins to be, wherever the Spirit breathes life, breaks bonds, turns stone into hearts of flesh, there is the Church: 'Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est'. And then we can start to draw the distinctions, make the precisions, indicate the structures which are necessary in order to protect the clarity and distinctiveness of message and movement.

In any human movement or organisation, it is the unsurprising tendency of administrators to lose sight of the fact that structure exists for the sake of function, and not the other way round. But, as the late Bishop Christopher Butler put it: all that is juridical in the Church is subordinate to its sacramentality.²

In his study of 'the Bishop-in-Synod', Canon Chittleborough of Adelaide contrasts 'hierarchical' and 'organic' models of the Church and claims that, in Lumen Gentium, 'the hierarchical model is clearly paramount'.³ Even allowing for the fact that his paper is solely concerned with church structures, that contention is seriously misleading. It overlooks the implications of the decision to insert a chapter on 'The People of God', between the opening chapter on 'The Mystery of the Church' and the chapter on hierarchical structure, precisely in order 'to emphasize the idea of the basic equality of all members of the Church before distinctions were made according to office

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2. See Christopher Butler, A Time to Speak (Southend, Mayhew McCrimmon, 1972), p.148. 'What is of importance to the churches, therefore, is to learn the way in which the effective communication of the gospel occurs, and to pay less attention to the theological legitimation of the formal structures' (Stephen W. Sykes, 'Catholicity and Authority in Anglican-Lutheran Relations', in Authority in the Anglican Communion [henceforward AAC], p.281).
 3. K.S. Chittleborough, 'Towards a Theology and Practice of the Bishop-in-Synod', AAC, p.157.

or charisma'.⁴ It is the first two chapters which provide the doctrinal context within which the third chapter is to be interpreted and not the other way round.

I am aware that there are Roman Catholics, some in positions of great power and prestige, who seem to wish it were not so. In fact, talking to one bishop before the special Synod held in Rome in 1985, I suggested that the key question to be put to the members of that Synod was: do you believe that the order adopted for the chapters of Lumen Gentium was an unfortunate mistake or one of the Council's major reforming achievements? To my Anglican friends I would say: when reading the Constitution, please interpret it in the context of its production.

The rich profusion of biblical imagery concerning Church and Kingdom, drawn upon in Chapter One of Lumen Gentium, is irreducible to any single pattern or picture. Church structures, on the other hand, are necessarily either of one kind or another (for no church can, simultaneously and in the same sense, be synodical and non-synodical, episcopalian and congregationalist). From the principle of the subordination of structure to sacramentality it follows (I suggest) that what we are to make of the structures (in the sense both of how we are to understand them and of what we are to do with them) is to be decided on the basis of our

4. Xavier Rynne, The Second Session (London, Faber, 1964), p.40.

interpretation of the biblical imagery, and not the other way round.

It is not my intention to imply that structural and juridical considerations do not matter. I only want to suggest, firstly, that there are good historical, theological, pedagogical, cultural, psychological, political and eschatological reasons for not allowing juridical concerns to determine the agenda and, secondly, that few notions are better fitted than that of 'peopleness' to help us keep structures subordinate to sacramentality in our quest for the recovery of unity.

Somewhat different considerations work in favour of another (and related) image so central in Jewish and Christian history, theology, iconography and hymnody that its neglect in ecumenical discussion is rather surprising. It is the image of the city. The principal differences arise from the fact that Christians actually, or literally, constitute a 'people', whereas we only metaphorically constitute a city.

Because we do actually constitute a people, therefore our unity (or disunity) is an historical, cultural, psychological and political fact which official statements and juridical stipulations can only affect, for better or for worse, to a quite limited extent (the Council of Florence would serve as warning here). On the other hand, the fact that the Church is only metaphorically a city may serve to remind us that the Scriptures indicate our

responsibilities by parables and pictures of God's promise, not by the provision of blueprints. It is simply a mistake to suppose that because a city has been promised, towards the construction of which we are required to labour, therefore all important questions of town planning (right down to the gender of magistrates) have already been resolved, once for all time, in the first century.

To say even this much is to touch on questions of enormous complexity concerning the genuinely historical character of Christian doctrinal decisions. Let me briefly illustrate why I have mentioned them.

Imagine an ancient city which, for hundreds of years, lived under a system of government that varied considerably from time to time and which sometimes served the city well and sometimes ill. Suppose the city to have once been riven with discord so profound that a wall was built, a 'green line' drawn, down the centre - and those who crossed risked death or punishment. In due course tensions eased and, in increasing numbers, people moved to and fro for purposes of tourism, commerce and even matrimony. During the long years of division, the different districts of the city had developed different habits and systems of local government, and different memories of how things had once been before the civil war and what its causes were.

The time came when, throughout the city, serious and practical consideration began to be given to the desirability of re-establishing some system of government

for the city as a whole. Discussion moved slowly, partly because the smaller and more democratic wards were not unreasonably afraid that some of the larger districts had ambitions to establish their hegemony over the whole.

In due course, a system of government for the city as a whole was re-established. It was not a perfect system, but it worked quite well (and, thanks to watchfulness and plain speaking all round, the fears that I mentioned just now proved unfounded). In retrospect, everybody agreed on two things: firstly, that becoming one city again was not, for all the inestimable benefit that it brought, the end of history or the dawning of utopia; and, secondly, that only with hindsight was it appreciated that the one thing which might have been predicted before the restoration of unity was that the new system of government was quite different from any that the city as a whole or any of its districts had ever previously experienced.

However, even that little parable about the unpredictability of the consequences of free human decisions will have struck many of you (quite reasonably) as begging far too many questions concerning the relationship between the 'local' and the 'universal' church. To that topic, therefore, I now turn.

4. Churches and the Church

How many churches are there? One. That is a confession of faith and an acknowledgement of responsibility. How many

churches are there? Lots of them. That is a plain statement of fact.

How may the many churches best exhibit the singleness of Christ's one Church? If that is (as I believe it to be) a good way of putting the question, then a word needs to be said about what counts as 'a' church. In both the Anglican and the Catholic traditions, the paradigm instance of a church is a diocese.

I say 'paradigm instance' because in neither tradition would it be denied that the term 'church' is properly applicable to both smaller- and larger-scale Christian communities. Wherever two or three are gathered together in His name it is proper to speak of 'church', and so (for example) we have 'house churches' and sometimes talk of Christian families as churches.⁵ It is when we move up the scale that the trouble starts. On the Catholic side, while nobody objects to referring to 'the Roman Catholic Church', in the singular (though I shall later suggest that this is a mixed blessing), there is some disagreement about the ecclesiological status of dioceses grouped through episcopal conferences. On the Anglican side, my impression is that the criteria of acceptable usage are primarily juridical. Thus, it is proper to speak of 'the' Church of Melanesia or 'the' Anglican Church of Canada because these entities have

5. See Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), art.11.

certain legislative authority. Is it, then, improper to speak of 'the' Anglican Church? One likely answer to this question (I think) would be: 'Yes, it is improper to speak of "the" Anglican Church because to do so implies that there is or should be some institution capable of legislating for the Anglican Communion as a whole. But, in fact, there is no such institution, nor should there be, for to create one would undermine the proper autonomy of the churches of the Anglican Communion'.

But does not this response risk putting the juridical cart before the sacramental horse? Is it not evidence of what might be called a 'law or nothing' approach to the quest for those institutional instruments which would best facilitate the exhibition, in the common life and witness of the diverse churches of the Anglican Communion, of the singleness of Christ's Church? A people, I suggest, is more deeply made by language than by law. When we speak of human institutions we should think first of languages - by which I do not mean of English or French but, more concretely, of particular stocks of story, song and memory; of distinctive conversational styles and tones of voice; and of the contexts in which such common language is sustained - and only derivatively of the formal codification in law of custom and conversation. (Incidentally, if I may be a little mischievous, I note with pleasure that the preparatory papers for our meeting refer, on several occasions, to 'the Anglican Church' and that the Report of

the 1982 Anglican-Lutheran Regional Commission referred to 'our two Churches'.)⁶

We often talk about the relationships between the 'local' and the 'universal' Church. Neither adjective is entirely apt. The basis for particular churches is not necessarily territorial or 'local', and it is perfectly possible (and has been for centuries) for distinct churches, in full communion, to inhabit common territory. And the use of 'universal' in this context (meaning, in fact, the Church all over the world) may give the misleading impression that 'everywhereness' is a sufficient condition of catholicity.

Let me go back to the beginning. How may the many churches best exhibit the singleness of Christ's one Church? The answer, surely, has to be worked out in terms of the tension between, on the one hand, the requirement that, in each place, the Church should have the freedom and flexibility to enable it to incarnate and bear witness to the Gospel according to the circumstances of that place and, on the other hand, the requirement that the sum of these particular witnesses should constitute one single church at least in the sense that what was said and done in the name of the Gospel was discernibly said and done in chorus and communion and not cacophony. I do not think I am being excessively controversial in saying that at present this

6. See ACC7/I/001, p.1; ACC7/I/001B, p.7; ACC7/I/001C, p.4. The Helsinki Report is quoted by Stephen Sykes in AAC, p.267. See also the reference to 'a world-wide Communion growing together into a universal Church' in ACC7/III/004, p.7.

tension is out of balance in both the Anglican and the Catholic Communions. And perhaps the more we put the pressure on each other to recover that balance the closer we shall move towards what Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Coggan, ten years ago tomorrow, described as 'the restoration of complete communion in faith and sacramental life'.⁷

I turn first to the imbalance in contemporary Catholicism (in my final section I shall tentatively suggest where imbalance in Anglicanism - if such there be - may lie). The papacy, today, is often expected to operate as the initiating centre of almost everything that might count as 'official' Catholic, life, thought and organisation. The marked reluctance exhibited by episcopal conferences to take issue (at least in public) with documents and directives emanating from Rome is striking evidence of the enduring effectiveness (even twenty years after the promulgation of the constitutions and decrees of Vatican II) of that 'transformation of Catholicism', occurring 'within a generation', by means of which, between 1848 and 1870, 'the Roman authorities took over the leadership of the Church'.⁸

It is not only journalists who seem to suppose that bishops, in some sense, are subjects of the Roman

7. 'The Common Declaration, 29 April 1977', ARCIC. The Final Report (London, SPCK & CTS, 1982), p.121.

8. J. Derek Holmes, The Triumph of the Holy See. A Short History of the Papacy in the Nineteenth Century (London, Burns & Oates, 1978), p.135.

congregations. I have even known bishops who gave evidence of harbouring some such view.

I personally regret that the good word 'magisterium', meaning 'teachership' (a function indispensable within the Christian church) should, early in the nineteenth century, have become contracted so as to refer, from now on, not to a function, but to a specific set of functionaries: namely, the bishops. I regret this development because it created the false impression that bishops do not need to learn and that only bishops have the duty and responsibility to teach.

But now listen to what was called the 'official commentary' issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in 1976, to accompany the same Congregation's 'Declaration ... on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Priesthood'. According to the commentary, the Declaration constitutes an intervention, on the part of 'the magisterium', primarily addressed to 'the bishops', whose duty it is to 'explain' it to their people. The inference would seem to be that it is now the officials of Cardinal Ratzinger's Congregation, and not the bishops of the Catholic Church, who constitute 'the magisterium'.⁹ In these circumstances, it does not surprise me that the 'reception' of ARCIC's Reports should take a little time!

The distortions of structure and ideology which make this situation possible are (as I indicated just now) of quite recent origin. (If I were doing an historical survey

9. See ACC7/I/001F, pp.23-24.

I would mention the importance of the Napoleonic wars and the coming of the railways, in the nineteenth century and, in our own, the development of air travel and television.) But let me briefly illustrate the point with reference to what is increasingly widely felt by Catholics to be a crucial issue: that of the appointment of bishops. In 1829, there were some 646 diocesan bishops in the Latin Church (that is, in the Patriarchate of the West). Of these, 555 were appointed by the State, some were elected by cathedral chapters, and the number directly appointed by the pope was 24. And yet, in 1917, the new Code of Canon Law could enunciate the novel legal principle that the pope had the right to appoint bishops anywhere in the Catholic Church.¹⁰

Power, once accrued, is not easily again dispersed. But I believe that the reform of the canons on episcopal appointment should be high on the list of those 'concrete deeds' by which, according to the late Karl Rahner, 'Rome ought courageously and unselfishly ... to prove ... that it is determined to renounce an ecclesiological monoculture in the Roman Catholic Church of the type attempted and largely

10. See Garrett Sweeney, 'The "wound in the right foot": unhealed?', in Bishops and Writers: Aspects of the Evolution of Modern English Catholicism, ed. Adrian Hastings (Wheatthampstead, Anthony Clarke, 1977), pp.207-234. Since at least the second Lateran Council of 1139, the canonical norm was election by the cathedral chapter and 'it was only late in the nineteenth century that Rome showed any signs of asserting a right to nominate all bishops' (p.211).

realized especially during ... the last hundred and fifty years'.¹¹

I have spoken plainly, and I hope you will forgive me if I continue to do so. I am continually saddened by the Anglican tendency simultaneously to make loud noises of disapproval of 'ecclesiological monoculturalism' while conniving in its perpetuation.

Let me first mention a trivial example. According to our preparatory documents, ARCIC has to do with relations between the Anglican Communion and 'the Vatican'.¹² That is rather like saying that ARCIC has to do with relations between the churches of the Roman Catholic Communion and 14 Great Peter Street!

More seriously, my impression is that although many of my fellow-Catholics make less effort than they ought to get some sense of the history, structure and ethos of Anglicanism, they do take some trouble to talk of Anglicanism in terms acceptable to Anglicans. And yet, Anglicans continue to talk of 'Romans', however often they are reminded that the term is, for two reasons, extremely offensive to Roman Catholics. It is offensive, firstly, because (perhaps especially in England) it has long been a way of insinuating that Catholics are, in some sense,

11. Karl Rahner, 'Unity of the Church - Unity of Mankind', Theological Investigations XX, tr. Edward Quinn (London, Darton Longman and Todd, 1981), p.170. This lecture was originally delivered in May 1977.

12. See ACC7/III, p.1.

outsiders or foreigners: residually alien. And, secondly, it offends because it rudely colludes with the ideology of the monoculture. For years I have been pointing out that I am not, and have never been, a member of the Roman Church. I am a member of the Church of East Anglia, the bishop of which (and this is of considerable importance to me) is in communion with the Bishop of Rome.¹³

It is, perhaps, worth mentioning that monocultural assumptions should not mislead us into supposing that it is always sensible to ask, even in matters of considerable importance, 'what the Roman Catholic position actually is',¹⁴ because there may be no such thing. Seasoned observers of the political scene know how often this is the wrong question to ask of the Kremlin or of an American administration. The disproportionately dominant part currently played in Roman Catholicism by the offices of the Roman Curia perhaps renders their activity not less but more like that of other centres of concentrated power.

Moreover, in spite of the structural staying-power of Ultramontaniam, do not be misled into underestimating the

13. The general rule I am advocating here is that we should describe other people as they prefer to be described. Thus, for example, I am happy to refer to Orthodox Christians without thereby deeming myself heretical, and to mention the Episcopal Church in Brazil without wondering whether I am thereby impugning the validity of the orders of the three hundred or so other bishops in Brazil who do not belong to that Church!

14. See J. Robert Wright, 'An Anglican Comment on Papal Authority in the Light of Recent Developments', AAC, p.263.

generous diversities of Roman Catholicism. I have been fortunate in my life in having been able to acquire some sense of Catholicism in contexts as different as (for example) England and Algeria, Denmark and New Zealand, Boston and Bombay, Hamburg and Hong Kong. In each place I have discovered myself (and it is a discovery) to be, as a Catholic, 'at home'. And yet, I have also learned why a distinguished Jesuit sociologist should have said thirty years ago: 'There's American Catholicism, there's French Catholicism, Italian Catholicism, and so on, but there's no Catholicism'.¹⁵

5. Authority: Dispersal and Decision

Commenting on the echo, in the ARCIC Final Report, of the famous 1948 Lambeth statement on 'dispersed authority', Professor Wright remarks that both Anglicans and Catholics 'would in a general way agree that the sources of authority are dispersed, although Anglicans (and some Roman Catholics) would want to add that its exercise is and should be more widely distributed throughout the church'.¹⁶ (I take him to mean that in Anglicanism it is and in Catholicism it should be!)

I think we need one more distinction here: the distinction between authority and power, where authority is

15. Joseph Fichte, S.J., quoted ad sensum by W.S.F. Pickering, 'The One and the Many: Archer's Analysis', in New Blackfriars, 68 (1987), p.56.

16. Wright, AAC, p.243.

understood primarily in terms of entitlement and responsibility, and power in terms of effectiveness and the capacity to produce results.¹⁷ There are (as my remarks on the 'monoculture' were intended to indicate) few deeper tensions within contemporary Catholicism than that between support for and resistance to neo-ultramontane concentrations of power. Ironically, the effect of such concentration is likely, in the long run, to be the diminishment of the authority of the so-called authorities. 'Authoritarianism' is a misnomer for exercises of power from which authority has fled. I happen to believe that more widespread dispersal of power throughout the Catholic Church would (for many Catholics, and perhaps also for Anglicans) in fact enhance the authority of the papacy.

Anglicanism is not, I think, much threatened by excessively centralised concentration of power. But it is perhaps threatened by the difficulty it experiences in creating appropriate instruments for the exercise today, as a Communion, of that authority which is simply another name for our entitlement and responsibility, as Christians, to proclaim the Gospel. A seminar in permanent session is quite a good image for at least some aspects of theological enquiry. It is not a good image for the process whereby a people or a movement decides where to make a stand and on

17. For further discussion, see Nicholas Lash, Voices of Authority (London, Sheed and Ward, 1976), pp.13-24; Theology on the Way to Emmaus (London, SCM Press, 1986), pp.191-194.

what ground (if need be) to die. Christian confession is axiomatic: it declares 'We hold these truths'. But, in order to be able to proclaim - not 'timelessly', but in prophetic response to particular situations and circumstances - the truth we hold, the faith once given to the saints, something more is required than an indication of where such truth might be learnt, of how it was once held, and of the context in which it would be held today if only we could find out how to do it.

I am (predictably, I hope) urging the need for common speech and common action, and for the creation of whatever common structures will facilitate such speech and action. The unity we seek will not be some illusorily 'harmonious state of equilibrium', nor will it be Christian unity if it is attained through 'specious reconciliation'. Every way forward, for each of our communions and for all of us together, is burdened with risk, and the ecumenical process is complicated by the fact that the fundamental 'battle-lines' of Christian disagreement no longer lie where they were drawn in the sixteenth century. Today, as yesterday, moreover, sacramentality is fragile, not lacking in ambiguity, shot through with suffering and uncertainty. 'The phenomenon of continuous conflict within Christianity' is, as my colleague Stephen Sykes has put it, 'the price to be paid for its potential to subvert the cultures in which it

is incarnated'.¹⁸ Nevertheless, however unavoidable conflict and division along the way, it is, above all the promise and the possibility of peace, of gentleness, of reconciliation, which we, as Christians, are required not only to assert but to exemplify. 'Subverting the culture' requires depths of spiritual strength which only the strongest bonds of common life and trust, of language and action - in a word, of 'koinonia' - are likely to provide.

Which brings me to the Final Report. My impression is that there is some uncertainty as to its theological status. It is clearly offered as more than an expression of the opinion of a handful of church leaders and scholars. On the other hand, it is surely not offered for our acceptance as a new credal profession of common faith? The members of ARCIC are not the Fathers of Nicea! And yet, we are being asked to accept or reject it as 'consonant' with our faith. What might this mean?

Suppose we were to say that the forms in which our Christian faith, interpretative of Scripture, is centrally and solemnly expressed, constituted the 'texts' of our confessions. The list of such texts would include (for both of us) the ancient creeds; for Anglicans it would also include, for example, the versions of the Prayer-book; for

18. Sykes, AAC, p.282. I am most grateful to Professor Sykes for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Roman Catholics, it would include the constitutions of Trent and the two Vatican Councils.

The Final Report is not, I suggest a further 'text' to be added to either of these lists. It is, rather, a collection of 'glosses' by means of which each of our two Communion is being invited to recognize, in the other's use of their 'texts', the confession of a common faith.¹⁹

Any such recognition would, of course, have far-reaching practical implications which the Commission is (I think) already beginning to explore. Which makes us nervous. But would not the non-acceptance of the Report be a striking instance of 'our present ecclesiastical and denominational structures providing a wrong kind of security and so distracting us from our central task of shared openness to God's mission in and through us?'²⁰

Close your eyes for a moment, and listen to the cries of dying children, to the quietly desperate sounds of countless millions without prospect of home or dignity, health, freedom or family. Forget what is said about 'natural

19. For some remarks, compatible with this suggestion, made at a much earlier stage of the ARCIC process, see Nicholas Lash, 'Credal Affirmation as a Criterion of Church Membership', in John Kent and Robert Murray, ed., Intercommunion and Church Membership (London, Darton Longman and Todd, 1973), pp.51-73.

20. See Bonds of Affection, p.35.

disaster'. The sum of contemporary human misery is largely attributable (directly, or at one or more removes) to structures erected by human egotism, arrogance, fearfulness and greed. And I have not even mentioned the increasing likelihood, if not in my lifetime then in that of my small son, of nuclear war.

Particular people suffer and die in particular places. It is only where people actually bleed and weep that their wounds can be bound up and their tears wiped away. Nevertheless, if we would confront not merely the symptoms but the causes of human misery, we are increasingly required to recognize the planetary interdependence of human action. Economically, politically, militarily, ecologically, and even culturally, this small planet has, to an unprecedented extent and with disconcerting rapidity, become one single network of causes and effects.

It seems to me of paramount importance that consideration of detailed topics of ecumenical strategy should never for one moment lose sight of the fact that this is the context in which, as Christians, we are absolutely required, as sacrament of God's own kingdom, to exemplify what 'peopleness' might be like. It is only in obedience to the requirements of this context that we can hope to discover and to construct the appropriate forms and images of the unity we seek in this one world.