



Unitas

THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE

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Response to the Proceedings of the General Synod of the Church of England and the Lambeth Conference, August 2008

The Catholic League for the Unity of Christians notes with regret the decision of the General Synod of the Church of England to proceed with the ordination of women to the episcopate.

As Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, observed in the statement of July 8, it signifies

‘a breaking away from the apostolic tradition maintained by all the Churches since the first millennium and therefore is a further obstacle for the reconciliation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.’

The position of Unitas-Catholic League

The League has been dedicated since its foundation in 1913 to the reunion, the visible unity, of the whole of Christendom. Therefore it has never supported partial ecumenism which excludes the Orthodox Church or the Apostolic See of Rome, hence the original concept of a league, and our contemporary campaign, ‘*Unitas*’.

It began as a witness among Anglicans to this holistic view of Christian re-integration, as the earlier Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christendom, which had once

included Orthodox, Anglicans and Roman Catholics, ended. Over the last two decades, it has restored this wider embrace as an ecumenical society, with a 600-strong membership drawn from the Anglican, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Free Churches in the United Kingdom. All aspire, even if in different ways, to the unity of all Christians somehow in full communion with the Bishop of Rome as perpetuator of St Peter's apostolic service to strengthen and nourish the universal Church of Christ.

So we are working to counter the sense that it is acceptable for churches to be separate. We promote the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the Church as communion, and Christian unity as fullness of communion. We endeavour to nurture prayer for unity and spiritual ecumenism. We actively support the Catholic ecumenical movement and especially the Holy See's efforts to overcome disunity and restore the fullest communion among the churches, on the basis of the perfected agreement in faith which must precede it.

In our view, without a shared commitment from all churches to a holistic view of the re-integration of Christ's Universal Church, it is difficult to see how the shared objective of Christian Unity according to his will can become that organic and visible reality on earth for which we long. It is more difficult to see how reconciliation among Christians can be furthered, let alone hastened, by the recent decision of the Church of England.

Unitas-Catholic League has refrained from detailed analysis of the Anglican debate on the episcopate. Partly this is because it could add nothing distinctive; and partly because an Anglican differentiation of the ordained ministry could not recognisably form part of the universal tradition of the one Church. The view from the worldwide college of Catholic bishops - clarified in the teaching of Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales, and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity through Cardinal Kasper in his 2006 address to the Church of England bishops - has been unequivocal. Besides, the issues of concern shared by our Anglican members with their Catholic and Eastern Christian friends have been fully set out by bishops and organisations within the Anglican Communion.

So our intention instead has been to emphasise the positive appeal of Catholic ecumenism, and the importance for the whole of people of God of unity in belief, order and

communion, at the dynamic heart of which must lie the immemorial witness of Peter in his successor, the bishop of the Church at Rome, which is the ministry of the Pope.

But now that the Church of England has made its decision, division between the Anglican Church and its Catholic and Orthodox ecumenical partners in preference to this search for communion has taken permanent, solid form. We have entered a new situation in the movement towards Christian unity. The old paradigm of reunion for the Catholic and Anglican churches - on the basis of episcopal structures to be mutually 'united, not absorbed' - has come to an end. So the League's work and witness towards the unity of all Christians with the See of Peter must adapt to a very new phase for ecumenism in general, and Anglican-Catholic relations in particular.

Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations Now

Towards the close of the 19th century, Anglican leaders had high hopes for unity between the Roman Catholic Church and their own 'reformed Catholicism'. While Anglican orders were not then recognised as Catholic, Pope Leo XIII in 1896 called for prayer for unity to be intensified, trusting that the problem could be solved. This led in 1908 to what became the century-old Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, then the Malines Conversations and later the fresh context following the Church of England's union with the Old Catholic Church.

Later came Vatican II's renewed teaching on the Church as the people of God and Christian unity as communion in Christ through baptism. Then followed the dialogues with other Christians, not least the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. By the 1990s Catholics were questioning invalidity in the Anglican Church rather than validity, in view of a common *aggiornamento* in the middle of the 20th century, parallel pastoral and liturgical renewal, and a largely shared understanding of the Church in the modern world.

Recently, this mutual identification found expression in the inspiring ARCIC report on *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. And both churches worldwide have re-committed themselves not just to theological dialogue but to active collaboration on evangelism and service, through the International Anglican and Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission.

It is tragic that after this long prepared closeness of mind and life, the Church of England chooses irrevocable changes to its structures that the Catholic Church has stressed it cannot consider itself free to accommodate.

Anglicanism's answer is that the doctrine of the Church, the Eucharist, priesthood and episcopate – largely agreed with the Catholic Church through ARCIC – remains unchanged. Any change concerns the principle of justice and equality, reasoned from baptism in Christ in which there is neither male nor female. To the Anglican Church this Scriptural correction to a cultural injustice can take precedence in the Kingdom of God over prior religious rulings.

A number of respected Orthodox and Catholic thinkers have been open to exploring this argument. But in neither the Orthodox Church nor the Catholic Church is it conceivable that such a change could be taken out of step with the agreement of the whole Church - or that anything, whatever its merits, might harm the unity of the household of faith.

After all, there is a painful memory common to us all of the effects of schism and mutual persecution down the ages. And the last three decades within Anglicanism indicate what happens to fullness of communion, if one group imposes its decision on another which it has failed to carry with it. The Church needs no more division.

Indeed, those Catholics who have encouraged Anglicanism in such changes, in the hope that the Vatican will follow suit, have done the Catholic Church a grave disservice in further preventing restored communion between Catholics and Anglicans. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches alike see that agreement in faith precede communion in the Eucharist. It is this prize, for which ecumenism is the race, which is denied us yet again.

As Cardinal Kasper has now told the Lambeth Conference, the decision to ordain women as bishops 'blocks substantially and finally' the recognition of Anglican church structures and priestly orders. These had opened up to review; but the introduction of additional areas of disagreement since the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue began means that its basis is altered. From now on, it proceeds at an altered level too. As Pope Benedict remarked at the World Youth Day celebrations in Sydney, the Church's objective is full

Eucharistic communion. But Anglican development in a divergent direction, says Cardinal Kasper, 'directly undermines our goal'. So both already long paths to unity in Christ, which once looked convergent, face extended diversions because of new Anglican obstacles.

Of course, the Catholic Church will come to terms with the Anglican decision. Dialogue and wisdom will deepen, as will the mature friendship, and collaboration on the ground. The Anglican-Catholic dialogue will now sit alongside the historic international dialogues with the Methodists, Lutherans, Reformed and Pentecostal Christians. It will be no less searching and fruitful. For instance, a root controversy of the Reformation – the doctrine of justification by faith - has been resolved in a joint declaration between the Holy See, the Lutheran World Federation, and the World Methodist Council. The Anglican Communion could follow suit.

Cardinal Kasper famously sees that in the Church there are always two principles vying with each other - the Catholic and the Protestant principles - or, as Kasper himself says, the unitive and the prophetic principles. They are there to correct and energise each other. Without a prophetic or 'Reform' instinct, the Catholic instinct for overriding oneness can get reduced to a sterile institutionalism that resists renewal, purification and development. And without the unifying Catholic instinct, the prophetic impulse for change and development can lead legitimate diversity into fragmentation, and place conscientious schism above ecclesial integrity. All churches should hold both principles together in harness, so that they can both drive the Church's growth and deepen its members' cohesion. If one prevails, the dual power of both is lost.

Kasper advocates 'receptive ecumenism', whereby the churches learn what, with integrity, they can receive from other Christian traditions in belief, worship, spirituality and even how their structures operate. The Church, in the Catholic Church par excellence, thus gains from God's gifts bestowed on other traditions – even some correctives - but which are held back behind false and worldly denominational barriers.

In January 2006 Cardinal Kasper was asked what the consequences for the Catholic Church would be if the Church of England were to admit women to the episcopate. He replied it would be an option for the Protestant principle over the unitive principle and end the Anglican claim to be both Catholic and Reformed. But, he continued, at least everyone

would know where the Anglican Church stood and Catholic-Anglican ecumenical relations could make progress again on this clearer new footing. And as he has now said to the Lambeth Conference:

‘It seems to us that the Anglican Communion is very close to the Protestant Churches of the sixteenth century and is taking a position that those Churches took until the second half of the twentieth century.’

Yet he has often observed that Anglicans and Catholics find themselves closer together now than at any time since the 16th century. Stark differences have now arisen because we are getting to the heart of our problems, not because we are more estranged. And so we can speak frankly with each other, precisely because our friendship is mature and we are committed to each other.

All the past achievements remain in place. They underpin current ecumenical understanding and they will sustain collaboration in mission and service into the future. And, even if the dialogue has been irrevocably changed, Anglican setbacks to the Catholic Church’s long term hopes for communion do not permit any turning back by the Holy See in following Christ on the path to unity. Striving for the goal of full Eucharistic communion is a duty of which none may tire.

The Next Steps for the Catholic League

The League will continue to promote the unity of all Christians with the See of Peter. Catholics believe that the Petrine ministry of the Church of Rome and its bishop, the Pope, ‘presiding in love’, is too precious a gift for Catholics to keep to themselves.

So, as always, we work to resist the spirit of denominationalism. Pope Benedict, supporting the Archbishop of Canterbury’s efforts to keep the Anglican Communion together, has given short shrift to attempts to draw Rome into breaking up *koinonia* within Anglicanism. The apostolic ministry of the Pope is always to strengthen the unity of Christ’s flock so that the world may believe, and not loosen bonds of communion.

So we would urge our Anglican members to do nothing that is not conducive to the greater unity of the Church as a whole.

We continue to foster spiritual ecumenism, as commended by Vatican II, in pilgrimages and prayer for unity in Christ, and the mutual exchange of the many gifts and riches in our distinctive traditions. The Church needs them all. Central is our reconciliation work to repair the distrust and hurt caused by past enmity, still affecting Christianity to this day. Hence our efforts towards a common 'new memory' about the Catholic and Protestant martyrs, as advocated by Pope John Paul. All this is in hope of a future 'unity in diversity' - but a rich diversity rooted in nothing other than unanimity in faith.

That said, it has to be borne in mind that (aside from the pastoral and mission problems posed by Pentecostalism) reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (including the Oriental Orthodox Churches) has now become the Holy See's ecumenical priority.

All our members should recognise that the Catholic Church's focus on East-West reunion will be the true dynamic determining the future course of relations with Anglicans and Reformation churches in the West.

Anglican and Roman Catholic Next Steps

It is sad that the perspective on those Anglicans who wished their Communion to keep to the shared practice of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is that they are a 'minority' of 'dissenters'. A lesson for the Christian unity movement has meant moving out of a history of persecution and denunciation and into giving an honoured place to principled difference; people who were once excommunicated, thanks to the Catholic ecumenical approach, are now seen as invaluable ecumenical partners and wise, critical friends. This spirit is needed just as much within church bodies as between them.

The idea of majorities is likewise beside the point. What matters is communion, and its fullness in the whole Church and between the churches. Once, famously, the Church was 'astonished to find itself Arian'. What overcame that divide, was not one side prevailing over the other – the Catholic-Orthodox were the minority – but the desire for undivided

participation in Christ and with each other. So the doctrinal question was resolved through the faith the Universal Church believes and practises in fullness of communion, not in the end through pursuing disputations and divisions.

Anglicanism prides itself on its comprehensiveness and interdependence. These are very closely related to St Paul's understanding of the Church as the communion of the baptised faithful, as taught by the Catholic Church. Thus it is alien to Catholic understanding that anyone should be expected to leave. Witness Pope Benedict's concern to repair the schism within Catholicism over the old rite of mass, at the same time as maintaining the overall unity of a very diverse Catholic Church worldwide. In the light of these principles, the reluctance towards the inclusion of the 'universal-oriented' Catholic believers in the Anglican world looks out of place.

But a separating out, of some sort, seems to be on the cards. It has to be borne in mind that the Catholic Church will maintain its ecumenical ties with Anglicanism undeterred from the search for fullness of communion. It will not be interested in rivalry, undermining the effectiveness and witness of the Anglican Christian tradition, or deepening division. But, as Pope Benedict has shown in his frequent aspirations for unity, the gift of fullness of communion which has been entrusted to the Catholic Church, along with her currently impeded vocation to fulfil her universality in history for the sake of all Christians, is so precious that it is her duty to share it.

So the Holy See seems concerned at this point in history, now that Anglicanism has resolved on its search for unity in closer company with the Reformation Churches rather than the Catholic Church, to make the gift of communion available more readily to those in other churches who are seeking closer agreement in Catholic faith and life.

Looking ahead, the Christian Church as a whole seems to present three pathways:

1. The Catholic and Orthodox churches in a gradual process of reconciliation
2. A re-grouping of Reformation churches, with which the Church of England is advanced in uniting in Europe, increasingly influenced by the Global South, still embracing liberal, Evangelical and Catholic traditions.

3. A movement of liberal Christian church bodies in the West, which will tend towards relativism and Unitarianism.

Bishop Edwin Barnes, president of the Church Union, states that Catholic Anglicans 'are looking to the future without any real chance of remaining members of the Church of England'. If so, we would urge not greater structural separation between Christians, but the path of greater communion with the wider Catholic Church as the authentic priority.

And of course, some will wish to remain convinced Anglicans, despite any disagreement, and play a full part in promoting Catholic (and Orthodox) belief and spirituality. From the Non-Jurors onward, this is an honoured witness, and should remain so. Indeed, in the new situation, Cardinal Kasper has called for a 'new Oxford Movement' to aid spiritual and receptive ecumenism, which will be needed now more than ever. But this cannot work as a semi-denominational group, 'between communion'.

Some will wish as individuals to become Roman Catholics. We hope the League will continue to be a source of spiritual support and fellowship on the journey towards fullness of communion. We also hope that the Catholic community and clergy will make every effort to make the transition to life in a new Church setting, as so often before, easy and fulfilling.

Some will be looking to reconciliation on a corporate basis. It is well known that there is wariness about this among Catholics in England - partly through fears of a multiplication of jurisdictions and an additional, organised body outside the jurisdiction of the local hierarchy; and partly because some Catholic commentators have little sympathy with their theological and ecclesiological position. But if Anglicans now wishing to be part of the Catholic Church wish above all to be loyally Catholic, then these thoughts should be set aside. They amount to insufficient grounds to deny the gift of communion which Catholics say is their most precious.

It is evident from the warmth of correspondence between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Traditional Anglican Communion that the Holy See is open to making room for an identifiable body of former Anglicans and the Catholic Church to achieve reconciliation. Furthermore, Archbishop John Myers of Newark, Ecclesiastical Delegate for the Pastoral Provision for Catholics of the Anglican Use in America, has

announced the expansion of the Holy See's mandate for the Pastoral Provision to include more faithful and clergy of 'continuing Anglican communities'. In the US, the Provision allows for the full integration of former Anglican groups into a local Catholic diocese – emphatically not as a semi-separate prelature or organisation – encouraged to use the Roman rite, both in traditional and contemporary English, with the addition of liturgical forms and prayers incorporated from the Anglican tradition. They are also free to use the usual form of the Roman Rite and the 'extraordinary form' where desired. There is a pastoral case for adapting this generous pastoral, spiritual and cultural accommodation to conditions in England and thus facilitating Christians in England desiring fullness of communion to be energetically loyal Catholics by (as Cardinal Hume once hoped) not turning their back on Anglicanism but bringing it with them.

Whatever the future holds, the League prays first and foremost for the unity of Christians according to the prayer of Jesus – unity according to his will, according to his means. We wish to provide fellowship and spiritual support to all Anglicans, now discerning the way ahead, to be faithful to the call to fullness of communion and especially for this to be realised for all in the unity of Christians with the See of Peter. We remain committed to Catholic ecumenism and especially to supporting the undiminished efforts in dialogue, collaboration and rapprochement between the Catholic Church and its 'ever beloved sister', the Anglican Communion.

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