

The Common Declaration by Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr George Carey

December 5, 1996

Once again in the city of Rome an Archbishop of Canterbury, His Grace George Carey representing the Anglican Communion, and the Bishop of Rome, His Holiness Pope John Paul II have met together and joined in prayer.

Conscious that the second Christian millennium, now in its closing years, has seen division, even open hostility and strife between Christians, our fervent prayer has been for the grace of reconciliation. We have prayed earnestly for conversion - conversion to Christ and to one another in Christ. We have asked that Catholics and Anglicans may be granted the wisdom to know, and the strength to carry out, the Father's will. This will enable progress towards that full visible unity which is God's gift and our calling.

We have given thanks that in many parts of the world Anglicans and Catholics, joined in one baptism, recognise one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and give expression to this through joint prayer, common action and joint witness. This is a testimony to the communion we know we already share by God's mercy and demonstrates our intention that it should come to the fullness willed by Christ. We have given particular thanks for the spirit of faith in God's promises, persevering hope and mutual love which has inspired all who have worked for unity between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church since our predecessors Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI met and prayed together. In the Church of Saint Gregory on the Celian Hill, we have remembered with gratitude the common heritage of Anglicans and Catholics rooted in the mission to the English people which Pope Gregory the Great entrusted to Saint Augustine of Canterbury.

For over twenty-five years a steady and painstaking international theological dialogue has been undertaken by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). We affirm the signs of progress provided in the statements of ARCIC I on the Eucharist and on the understanding of ministry and ordination, which have received an authoritative response from both partners of the dialogue. ARCIC II has produced further statements on salvation and the Church, the understanding of the Church as communion, and on the kind of life and fidelity to Christ we seek to share. These statements deserve to be more widely known. They require analysis, reflection and response. At present the International Commission is seeking to further the convergence on authority in the Church. Without agreement in this area we shall not reach the full visible unity to which we are both committed. The obstacle to reconciliation caused by the ordination of women as priests and bishops in some provinces of the Anglican Communion has also become increasingly evident, creating a new situation. In view of this, it may be opportune at this stage in our journey to consult further about how the relationship between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church is to progress. At the same time, we encourage ARCIC to continue and deepen our theological dialogue, not only over issues connected with our present difficulties but also in all areas where full agreement has still to be reached.

We are called to preach the Gospel, urging it "in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2). In many parts of the world Anglicans and Catholics attempt to witness together in the face of growing secularism, religious apathy and moral confusion. Whenever they are able to give united witness to the Gospel they must do so, for our divisions obscure the Gospel message of reconciliation and hope. We urge our people to make full use of the possibilities already available to them, for example in the Catholic Church's Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (1993). We call on them to repent of the past, to pray for the grace of unity and to open themselves to God's transforming power, and to cooperate in all appropriate ways at local, national and provincial levels. We pray that the spirit of dialogue may prevail which will contribute to reconciliation and prevent new difficulties from emerging. Whenever actions take place which show signs of an attitude of proselytism they prevent our common witness and must be eliminated.

We look forward to the celebration of 2000 years since the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (cf. Jn 1:14). This is an opportunity to proclaim afresh our common faith in God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son, not to condemn the world but so that the world might be saved through him (cf. Jn 3:16-17). We encourage Anglicans and Catholics, with all their Christian brothers and sisters, to pray, celebrate and witness together in the year 2000. We make this call in a spirit of humility, recognising that credible witness will only be fully given when Anglicans and Catholics, with all their Christian brothers and sisters, have achieved that full, visible unity that corresponds to Christ's prayer "that they may all be one" so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).

GEORGE CANTUAR
JOHN PAUL II

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