

THE LOCAL CHURCH IN THE ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC CONSULTATION: ECCLESIOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS AND ECUMENICAL IMPLICATIONS

To complement Father Boyer's presentation in this Special Interest Session, which has provided us with a theological reflection upon the more pastoral aspects of our topic, my paper proposes to examine the principal texts of the documentation from the Anglican/Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation that refer to the "local church" as well as the ecclesiology apparently presupposed to such agreed statements and also to explore their possible implications for both churches in their quest for organic unity. This approach is intended to help us reflect further upon the meaning of the many interesting comments made in his paper for the purpose of focusing our discussion.

As a very brief and broad background to this presentation, I should like to call your attention to a few facts about the Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogue in the U.S.A. (ARC) and its international commission (ARCIC) as well as the official documents of both (*ARC DOC*).¹ ARC in the U.S.A. is one of several national bilaterals between the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics. Unless otherwise indicated, this paper deals with the documents from ARC (U.S.A.) and ARCIC, and refers to the American Consultation simply as ARC. ARC held its first meeting in Washington, DC, during June 1965 prior to the formation of ARCIC. This Joint Commission on Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations in the United States has met on the average of every nine months over the past sixteen years. Its members are named by the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America and by the Roman Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious affairs, respectively (I've been a Roman Catholic member since 1975).

In a most significant statement issued at its seventh meeting (ARC VII), the Consultation declared its goal to be "full communion" between the two churches and "organic unity." It explained these terms:

¹*ARC DOC—Documents on Anglican/Roman Catholic Relations* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference). To date four of these collections have appeared and in this paper are referred to as *ARC DOC* (1972), *ARC DOC II* (1973), *ARC DOC III* (1976), and *ARC DOC IV* (1979).

Full communion must not be interpreted as an agreement to disagree while sharing in the Eucharistic gifts, nor may organic unity be understood as a juridical concept implying a particular form of Church government. Such a unity is hard to visualize, but would include a common profession of faith and would mean a sufficient compatibility of polity to make possible a united mission to the human family. Whatever structural forms emerge, it is hoped that cultural and liturgical variety will remain so that the values of the Roman and the Anglican ethos will survive and develop.

We hope also to further the reconciliation of our respective Churches in such a way as to promote the still wider reconciliation with other Christian Churches.²

Such a goal, therefore, requires a legitimate diversity necessary for authentic *catholic* unity. This valid pluriformity can be preserved only by a proper relationship of the local churches to the universal Church avoiding both a monolithic uniformity and a schismatic or heretical deformity.

An appendix to the same document asserts that ARC "recognizes that it can make only recommendations, not decisions, concerning relations and doctrinal agreements between our two Churches."³ The appropriate authorities of each church, after due consultation with the parent bodies of ARC, must arrive at such decisions. At the same time we members of ARC fully realize our commitment of fidelity to our respective traditions of faith so that our agreed statements seek to reflect proper interpretations of God's Word unto the mutual enrichment of both our communions in their Christian mission to the world. And so it is important that the fruits of our dialogue be shared with the membership of our churches in order that as many as possible will pray and work for "full communion" and "organic unity."

Finally, it seems worth noting that ARC has its own agenda, even if it always makes an appropriate response to the agreed statements of ARCIC in light of its concerns with the local churches of America. Of course there is a considerable coincidence of concerns on the national and international levels. But the agenda of the latter does not fully determine that of the former. At the past five meetings of ARC from March 1978 to March 1981, the members have been devoting themselves primarily to the formulation of a Christian anthropology as the theological basis of addressing such questions as sexual imagery in speaking about God, the place of Mary in doctrine and devotion, the roles of and relationships between men and women in church and society, ethical issues affecting human sexuality and family life, and a particular issue such as that of the ordination of women practiced in the

²ARC DOC, p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 22.

American Episcopal Church. These questions and issues reflect international interests and concerns but have not been directly dealt with by ARCIC. In fact, what transpires on the national level often enough paves the way for agreed statements at the international commission's level, as indeed it should according to a proper theology of the worldwide communion arising from the local churches. For instance ARC IV (meeting in Milwaukee, May 1967) issued a statement on the Eucharist which must have helped prepare for the ARCIC Windsor Statement of 1971.⁴ We are fortunate to have three members of ARC currently also serving on ARCIC. For, since both our churches are worldwide, there must be good communication and collaboration of ecumenical efforts between the national commission representing the local churches and that representing the universal Communion.

Principal References to the "Local Church" in Documents of ARC and ARCIC

The clearest description in *ARC DOC* of what both our churches mean when they speak of a "local church" is found in the so-called Venice Statement, i.e., "An Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church" issued by ARCIC at their 1976 meeting in Venice. Because it is the key *locus*, the text is quoted here in full:

Communion among the Churches. The *koinonia* is realized not only in the local Christian communities, but also in the communion of these communities with one another. The unity of local communities under one bishop constitutes what is commonly meant in our two communions by "a local church," though the expression is sometimes used in other ways. Each local church is rooted in the witness of the apostles and entrusted with the apostolic mission. Faithful to the Gospel, celebrating the one Eucharist and dedicated to the service of the same Lord, it is the Church of Christ. In spite of diversities each local church recognizes its own essential features in the others and its true identity with them. The authoritative action and proclamation of the people of God to the world therefore are not simply the responsibilities of each church acting separately, but of all the local churches together. The spiritual gifts of one may be an inspiration to the others. Since each bishop must ensure that the local community is distinctively Christian he has to make it aware of the universal communion of which it is part. The bishop expresses this unity of his church with others: this is symbolized by the participation of several bishops in his ordination.⁵

The chief concern of the Venice Statement is the need for primacy in the universal Church and the nature and exercise of authority associated with that primacy. The immediate context of the above text is "Authority in the Communion of Churches" as the docu-

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁵*ARC DOC IV*, pp. 5-6.

ment designates it. And, as one commentary on the Venice Statement explains: "The normal functioning of authority as guardian of truth in the Church takes place within the local church, in the diocese or the province or the natural unit of the community which may be determined by national and linguistic factors."⁶ The whole approach of this document is to perceive the development of structures in the universal Church as emerging from the needs to preserve the catholicity, i.e., the unity amidst diversity, of local churches. In speaking of conciliarity, it states: "Ever since the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) the churches have realized the need to express and strengthen the *koinonia* by coming together to discuss matters of mutual concern and to meet contemporary challenges. Such gatherings may be either regional or worldwide."⁷ The document interprets the authoritative decrees of ecumenical and regional councils or synods as "designed to strengthen the life and mission of the local churches and of their members."⁸ And so, although it indicates some flexibility in usage of the expression "local church," the Venice Statement apparently intends it ordinarily to mean a diocese as was confirmed by a member of ARC serving on ARCIC. The bishop of the diocese or local ordinary is presented as the "focus-person" of unity amidst diversity, as the one who oversees the local church and keeps it in living communion with the other particular churches. In speaking of the primacy of the bishop of Rome who rightly exercises his oversight to safeguard and foster the faithfulness of all the local churches to Christ and to one another the document declares: "Communion with him is intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church, and as a sign of the communion of all the churches."⁹ Finally, in the context of discussing the authority to teach in matters of faith, it states: "A local church cannot be truly faithful to Christ if it does not desire to foster universal communion, the embodiment of that unity for which Christ prayed. . . . Every local church must therefore ever seek a deeper understanding and a clearer expression of this common faith. . . ."¹⁰

At this point we might well compare the concept of local church in the Venice Statement with the theological understanding of this ecclesial reality taught in the documents of Vatican II.¹¹

⁶E. J. Yarnold, S.J. and Henry Chadwick, *Truth and Authority: A Commentary on the Agreed Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, Venice 1976* (London: CTS/SPCK, 1977), p. 16.

⁷ARC DOC IV, p. 6.

⁸*Loc. cit.*

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰*Loc. cit.*

¹¹Cf., *CTSA Proceedings* 35 (1980), Sabbas Kilian, "The Meaning and Nature of the Local Church"; Patrick Granfield, "The Local Church as a Center of

Substantially they seem to be the same. *Lumen gentium* adds a theological reflection to the liturgical interpretation of the local church given in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and relates rather clearly the local or particular church to the universal Church. In summary, No. 26 of *LG* teaches: (1) the New Testament churches constitute the exemplar of a legitimate local congregation; (2) in addition to the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, the preaching of the word of God is also constitutive of the very nature of the local church; (3) the ministry of the bishop, though another constituent of the meaning, nature and function of the local church, does not require that he preside over every eucharistic celebration, but the fact that he does offer it or cause it to be offered seems to suffice for his special role; (4) local churches are a symbol of the charity and unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, the concrete sacramental actualization and revelation through the operation of the Holy Spirit of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in this place and at this time; and, (5) although the document's references to communities would fit a parish more suitably than a diocese, the explanation apparently is Vatican II's desire to integrate parishes more vitally into the diocesan structure or to form city-dioceses where the working relationship between the bishop and his flock might resemble the New Testament model more faithfully. The Council's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, in the context of referring to the Orthodox churches of the East, asserts: "... through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature, and through concelebration, their communion with one another is made manifest" (No. 15). This teaching affirms the truth that the local church not only manifests the Church universal but is also its real edification. The other important conciliar reference to the local church is found in the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus* (No. 11) which confirms the fact that the expression signifies primarily, if not exclusively, the diocese in the Council's teaching. And this concurs with the theological concept of local church in the Venice Statement.

Some other references to the local church, at least by implication, in the documents from the Anglican/Roman Catholic Consultation are: (1) "ARC IV Statement on the Eucharist"—"The Church is the Body of Christ and is built up by the Word through the Eucharist."¹² (2) ARCIC "Agreed Statement on Eucharistic

Communication and Control"; Bernard Prusak, "Theology of the Local Church in Historical Development." (These papers have been particularly useful in the formulation of my own comments here.)

¹²ARC DOC, p. 3.

Doctrine" (Windsor)—"Christ through the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist builds up the life of the Church, strengthens its fellowship and furthers its mission."¹³ (3) ARC "Agreed Statement on the Purpose of the Church"—"The Church which proclaims God's Word expresses its own life most fully when it gathers as a community for worship, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the summit and source of its mission."¹⁴ (4) "The Ecclesial Nature of the Eucharist" (Report of Joint Study Group of ARC in Scotland)—"... if Christ is the sacrament of the Father, and if the Church is the sacrament of Christ, then the sharing of the eucharistic meal is the sacrament of the Church."¹⁵ (5) ARCIC "Canterbury Statement" on the doctrine of ministry—"The communion of the churches in mission, faith and holiness, through time and space is ... symbolized and maintained in the bishop."¹⁶ (6) ARC "A Twelve Year Report"—"The relation of bishops to one another and of the Bishop of Rome to other bishops ... should in no way detract from the ministry bishops also share with priests, deacons and lay people. The co-responsibility of all the people of God, both in the deliberations and in the decision-making process of the Church, which received renewed emphasis for Roman Catholics in the Second Vatican Council, has long been a concept of vital importance to Anglicans and is now another aspect of convergence that both our churches share."¹⁷ The implications of these references for the meaning, nature and function of the local church, although they must be already partially apparent in light of what has been said so far, will be made more explicit in the next section of this presentation.

Some Ecclesiological Presuppositions in Agreed Statements of ARC and ARCIC

The local church may now be described as the gathering of believers in Christ around their bishop who guides and leads them particularly through his ministry of the Word and Sacraments, especially in the celebration of the eucharistic Liturgy. It is both the sign and the sacrament of the universal Church, not only representing it but also rendering it present as the place of divinization or where human beings are united with God in the Spirit of our risen Lord. Contemporary ecclesiology endorses the emphasis of Eastern theology which has traditionally given a certain priority to

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁴*ARC DOC III*, p. 6.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁷*ARC DOC IV*, pp. 39-40.

the local church whence emerges the catholic unity of the universal Church as a Communion of communions.

"A local church is wholly the church but it is not the whole Church."¹⁸ It reveals the reality of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church but is not completely commensurate with the total mystery. For the local church is called to proclaim and make present Christ in his integrity in the language and customs of the place where it has been providentially established. In the conditions of space and time this must be a limiting factor. And, with the exception of Rome, the bishop of the local church does not exercise the Petrine Ministry. At the same time, it is called to help enrich the other communions of the universal Church with the treasures found in the great cultures of humanity. The Word of God both in proclamation and sacramental celebration finds a rich diversity of expression. The special ministry of each diocesan bishop or local ordinary, therefore, is both toward his local church in overseeing its internal welfare by being principally responsible for making Christ integrally and effectively present to his people and also toward the universal Church by making available to other local churches whatever contributions his communion can make to them. The special ministry of the pope as Bishop of Rome is to foster this collegial openness in the whole Church.

The theology of Church presupposed in the Agreed Statements of ARC and ARCIC may be predominantly characterized as a "*communio* ecclesiology." In ARC's "A Twelve Year Report," we read: "... the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches share so profound an agreement on the level of faith that these Churches are in fact 'sister Churches' in the one *Communio* which is the Church of Christ."¹⁹ According to Yves Congar, the Church is in its ultimate reality, a fellowship of persons in communion with God and with one another in Christ.²⁰ At the same time, he regards the other aspect in the mystery of the Church as inseparable from and subordinated to it, namely, the hierarchical structure which exists precisely in order to bring into being and to sustain this new creation of communion in Christ. Jerome Hamer has also made the category of communion central to his ecclesiology, and agrees with Congar that the institutional is an essential but secondary dimension of the ecclesial mystery. He concludes that the Church, "the mystical body of Christ, is a communion which is at once inward and external, an inward communion of spiritual life (of faith, hope,

¹⁸J. J. Von Allmen, "L'Eglise locale parmi les autres Eglises locales," *Irénikon* 43 (1970), 512.

¹⁹ARC DOC IV, p. 32.

²⁰Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1965); cf. pp. 28-58.

and charity) signified and engendered by an external communion in profession of the faith, discipline and the sacramental life."²¹

While in principle no model of the Church can ever exhaust the infinite richness of her mysterious existence, that of mystical communion does enjoy certain theological and ecumenical advantages during the current era of salvation history. It indeed favors a strong emphasis upon the catholicity of the local church with its great diversity amidst unity out of which the universal Church is built up. And it does emphasize what we already share in common with our sisters and brothers in the other Christian churches. It is an antidote to excessive institutionalism in ecclesiological theory and praxis. As Avery Dulles observes: "The Church is not a mere means. It is not just a vehicle to bring men to heaven. The Church in a certain sense exists for its own sake. Wherever men are in the Church they have partly fulfilled the aim of their existence; they are, at least inchoatively, in union with God."²² Certainly this completely accords with the fundamental importance of the local church and with the Christian unity we already share with the communions of other churches, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant.

At the same time the model of the Church as a mystical communion requires contributions from other ecclesial models in order to compensate for its inherent limitations. I should like to submit for your consideration in this context that the model of Church as a sacrament is especially well suited for this purpose. It both preserves the notion of Church as primarily an inner reality of Christ's grace which the Church must manifest and cause as an efficacious sign, and also introduces the institutional aspects, but as meaningful structures vividly signifying the community of life in Christ and existing for its sake. Likewise the sacramental model can make the values of proclaiming the Good News and of stewardship in the world compatible with the "*communio ecclesiology*" without detracting from the primacy of being one in the Spirit of our risen Lord. Only by being a sign to others of its community life in Christ and of its willingness to cooperate with all in building a better world can the Church witness to the authenticity of its Christian *communio*.

Some Ecumenical Implications of the Theology of the Local Church

On the basis of the conviction that whatever contributes to the authentic unity of any particular Christian church must in the long

²¹J. Hammer, *The Church is a Communion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 93.

²²A. Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 54.

run bring all the churches closer together in Christ, the following criteria of restructuring implied by a theology of the Church as a sacramental communion are proposed for your reflection and discussion. If we may envision the "full communion" and "organic unity" towards which we are prayerfully striving as a reunion in which the world-wide Anglican communion or Lutheran communion, etc., will be analogous to distinct rites within the *Catholica*, then a strengthening of the theology and structures of the local church can only contribute to the ecumenical movement. And while I discuss the following proposals about structuring the Church as a *communion* in the context of the Roman Catholic experience, they should have some relevance to other Christian churches as well.²³ Certainly, in light of Father Boyer's comments about the problem of parochialism, they should speak somewhat to Anglicans also.

The implications of a theology of Church as a sacramental communion for the diocesan structures are based upon "the spirituality, life style, and ease with which the bishop is present to the diocese."²⁴ As we have seen, the documents of Vatican II as well as of ARC and ARCIC present him as both a focal point of unity within the local church and a link with the *communio* of local churches around the world. To preserve and intensify the unity of the local church, it is of basic importance that the bishop look upon it with an attitude of stewardship and not of ownership. Together with his priests through the agency of councils and priests' senates, he is to form a *presbyterium* in the service of the local church. Diocesan pastoral councils truly representing a broader spectrum of the laity, religious and clergy ought to be in fact coresponsible in deliberations regarding whatever affects their life of faith together. In addition to this policy-making level, the diocesan staff which assists the bishop in implementing policy should render an account of their participatory stewardship regularly. It is most important that they be a prayerful as well as careful and competent people since the communal discernment of the Spirit is of primary concern in their coresponsibility of recognizing the signs of the times in order to serve the real needs of God's People. The bishop ought to be free frequently to exercise his ministry of spiritual leadership in the diocese on a more personal basis by celebrating the Eucharist with and preaching the Good News to local congregations, by participating actively in ecumenical collaboration of shared prayer, dialogue, mutual witness in causes of common social con-

²³Cf. James H. Provost, "Structuring the Church as a Communio," *The Jurist* 1, 2 (1976), 191-245.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 208.

cern, etc., and by directly overseeing the missionary commitments of the diocese. He must continuously keep his people in touch with other local churches and with other congregations within their own local church. In this context the size of the diocese is very significant. It should be small enough so that the bishop can get to know and love his priests and people on a more intimate basis, but large enough to provide a diversity of ministries more reflective of the concerns of the universal Church.

Of particular ecumenical importance, especially in our dialogue with the Anglicans, is that we Roman Catholics in our theology and restructuring of the local church show our serious resolve to implement the coresponsibility of all the people of God in our dioceses. The above proposals are intended to help us think and act in that direction. In this context we must be very careful not to "clericalize" our concept of the local church. In trying to define its place within the total mystery of the Church there is a tendency to limit its meaning, nature and function to the ministry of the bishop and of priests and deacons in the ministries of Word and Sacraments. This is a point that deserves our special attention during the discussion period. With that in mind, I should like to submit that the implications of a theology of Church as a sacramental communion should help us avoid such clericalism.

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