Called to Full Unity

Documents on Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations 1966-1983

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Where We Are: A Challenge for the Future
A Twelve-Year Report

Preface

Having met nineteen times over a twelve-year period, the national consultation of the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches in the U.S.A. now issues a report to its sponsoring communities. The report is both a summary of past work and a challenge for future cooperation. The Consultation believes it has discovered a significant and substantial unity of faith between the two Churches, a unity which demands visible expression and testimony now. At the same time, the Consultation honestly recognizes differences which continue to separate the two Churches. In the following pages we present, at this point in our work, conclusions and suggestions to our sponsoring bodies for evaluation, response, and action. We offer direction to the Churches which commission us, but we also seek direction and a continuing mandate from those Churches for the pursuit of the unity God wills for His church.

The Most Rev. Raymond W. Lessard, Bishop of Savannah
The Rt. Rev. Arthur A. Vogel, Bishop of West Missouri
Co-Chairmen
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Introduction

Since 1965 the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church have been in officially sponsored dialogue. At the request of these Churches, these meetings have been conducted in this country by the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the USA (ARC), whose members have been jointly appointed by the authorities in both Churches. The purpose of these official consultations has been to aid both Churches in realizing together that unity for which Christ prayed.

After 12 years of study ARC contends that the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church agree at the level of faith on such topics as the Holy Eucharist, Priesthood and Ordination, and the nature and mission of the Church. There is also a common understanding between us of the theological methodology necessary for ecumenical dialogue. Yet agreement even at the level of faith is not always evident in visible expression. The Episcopal and the Roman Catholic Churches differ in their forms of worship, their traditions of spirituality, their styles of theological reflection and in some of their organizational structures of church life. Despite these historically conditioned differences, however, ARC finds after 19 joint consultations that 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. ¹

How may this unity in faith be shown? We propose that such unity be given expression in an immediate responding together in the Spirit through Christ to the Father. In this report we suggest specific joint activities which can be undertaken by our two Churches, and we indicate some areas which we think require further investigation.

A. Responding Together in the Spirit through Christ to the Father

1. Worship. The ritual patterns in the liturgies of Baptism and Eucharist in both our Churches show that we both understand the Christian life as a response not only to historical events but also to transcen-