



The Holy See

COMMON DECLARATION OF POPE JOHN PAUL II AND THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

1. In the Cathedral Church of Christ at Canterbury the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury have met on the eve of Pentecost to offer thanks to God for the progress that has been made in the work of reconciliation between our Communion. Together with leaders of other Christian Churches and Communities we have listened to the Word of God; together we have recalled our one baptism and renewed the promises then made; together we have acknowledged the witness given by those whose faith has led them to surrender the precious gift of life itself in the service of others, both in the past and in modern times.

2. The bond of our common baptism into Christ led our predecessors to inaugurate a serious dialogue between our Churches, a dialogue founded on the Gospels and the ancient common traditions, a dialogue which has as its goal the unity for which Christ prayed to his Father “so that the world may know that thou has sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me”. In 1966, our predecessors Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey made a Common Declaration announcing their intention to inaugurate a serious dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion which would “include not only theological matters such as Scripture, Tradition and Liturgy, but also matters of practical difficulty felt on either side”. After this dialogue had already produced three statements on Eucharist, Ministry and Ordination, and Authority in the Church, Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Donald Coggan, in their Common Declaration in 1977, took the occasion to encourage the completion of the dialogue on these three important questions so that the Commission’s conclusions might be evaluated by the respective Authorities through procedures appropriate to each Communion. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission has now completed the task assigned to it with the publication of its Final Report, and as our two Communion proceed with the necessary evaluation, we join in thanking the members of the Commission for their dedication, scholarship and integrity in a long and demanding task undertaken for love of Christ and for the unity of his Church.

3. The completion of this Commission's work bids us look to the next stage of our common pilgrimage in faith and hope towards the unity for which we long. We are agreed that it is now time to set up a new international Commission. Its task will be to continue the work already begun: to examine, especially in the light of our respective judgments on the Final Report, the outstanding doctrinal differences which still separate us, with a view towards their eventual resolution; to study all that hinders the mutual recognition of the ministries of our Communion; and to recommend what practical steps will be necessary when, on the basis of our unity in faith, we are able to proceed to the restoration of full communion. We are well aware that this new Commission's task will not be easy, but we are encouraged by our reliance on the grace of God and by all that we have seen of the power of that grace in the ecumenical movement of our time.

4. While this necessary work of theological clarification continues, it must be accompanied by the zealous work and fervent prayer of Roman Catholics and Anglicans throughout the world as they seek to grow in mutual understanding, fraternal love and common witness to the Gospel. Once more, then, we call on the bishops, clergy and faithful people of both our Communion in every country, diocese and parish in which our faithful live side by side. We urge them all to pray for this work and to adopt every possible means of furthering it through their collaboration in deepening their allegiance to Christ and in witnessing to him before the world. Only by such collaboration and prayer can the memory of the past enmities be healed and our past antagonisms overcome.

5. Our aim is not limited to the union of our two Communion alone, to the exclusion of other Christians, but rather extends to the fulfilment of God's will for the visible unity of all his people.

Both in our present dialogue, and in those engaged in by other Christians among themselves and with us, we recognize in the agreements we are able to reach, as well as in the difficulties which we encounter, a renewed challenge to abandon ourselves completely to the truth of the Gospel. Hence we are happy to make this Declaration today in the welcome presence of so many fellow Christians whose Churches and Communities are already partners with us in prayer and work for the unity of all.

6. With them we wish to serve the cause of peace, of human freedom and human dignity, so that God may indeed be glorified in all his creatures. With them we greet in the name of God all men of good will, both those who believe in him and those who are still searching for him.

7. This holy place reminds us of the vision of Pope Gregory in sending St. Augustine as an apostle to England, full of zeal for the preaching of the Gospel and the shepherding of the flock. On this eve of Pentecost, we turn again in prayer to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who promised to ask the Father to give us another Advocate to be with us for ever, the Spirit of truth, to lead us to the full unity to which he calls us. Confident in the power of this same Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves anew to the task of working for unity with firm faith, renewed hope and ever deeper love.

May 29th 1982

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana