

Catholic, Anglican churches seeking harmony

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ordaining women priests — continue to divide the two churches.

Archbishop Carey told the pope that ordaining women to the priesthood "is a possible and proper development of the doctrine of the ordained ministry," according to a joint statement released after the May 25 meeting.

"The Holy Father reiterated ... that this development constitutes a decision which the church does not see itself entitled to authorize and which constitutes a grave obstacle to the whole process of Anglican-Roman Catholic reconciliation," the statement said.

Archbishop Carey later told journalists that the discussion about women priests was "the toughest" part of the meeting. He added that the pope "understood exactly what we were saying" about the reason some churches in the Anglican Communion have decided to ordain women. And, "I was able to understand the thrust he was getting at."

"It sometimes looks as though the Roman Catholic Church has a negative attitude toward women," the archbishop said. The pope "wanted to make the point that the emphasis is on the dignity of women in the world today, and that came across very strongly."

The Church of England, which Archbishop Carey leads, is expected to vote this fall on whether to join other Anglican churches in ordaining women. A number of Anglicans still oppose women's ordination, which began over a decade ago, but churches in such countries as the United States, Canada, New Zealand and the colony of Hong Kong have adopted the practice.

The Vatican's position is that women cannot be ordained for a number of reasons, including the fact that Christ chose only men as apostles; the unbroken tradition of the church; and the doctrine that in celebrating the Eucharist, the priest acts in the person of Christ, who was a man.

The proper role of women in ministry is only one of a number of issues that pose potential obstacles to unity between the Anglican and Roman churches. Disagreements over moral teachings on abortion and birth control vie against disputes over Marian dogmas and papal authority to create difficulties for those seeking to bring the two churches together.

Nonetheless, the fact that Anglicans and Roman Catholics in 1992 take each other seriously as Christians is itself a formidable achievement, said Father Bruce Hanson, ecumenical officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester.

"The dialogue has produced a complete change in atmosphere," Father Hanson said. "Roman Catholics and Anglicans see much more of a kinship in each other than they would have 25 years ago."

That attitude even encompasses the feelings of lay members of both churches, he explained.

"Gone are the days when a Protestant would rather die than go into a Roman Catholic church and vice versa," he noted.

The two Christian neighbors first met over the fence post in March of 1966, when Pope Paul VI and Anglican Archbishop Michael Ramsey talked in Rome. Less than a year later, a joint commission of the churches met and within a year produced a report calling the churches to repent of their past division and to work toward full unity.

This effort inspired the formation in 1970 of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, known as ARCIC I. Comprising representatives from both churches, the



Illustration by Matthew Morgaine

commission met over the next decade, issued several statements, and presented its final report in 1982. A second commission, ARCIC II, was established that same year and has issued further statements.

ARCIC I's final report stressed that both churches "confess the same faith in the one true God," "receive the same Spirit," "have been baptized with the same baptism," and "preach the same Christ." Both churches also emphasize the need for officially ordained ministers distinguished from the laity, the report said.

In 1988, the Lambeth Conference, an international meeting of Anglican church leaders, endorsed the work of ARCIC I and praised its final report. Participants also acknowledged that the practice of ordaining women could affect the outcome of unity talks with the Catholic Church.

The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity issued their response to ARCIC I in December, 1991.

The Vatican's response pointed out that ARCIC I's final report dealt with such potential areas of disagreement as papal authority and infallibility, and the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.

Papal authority, for example, would probably have to be redefined for the two churches to reunite, observers explained.

Anglicans are willing to acknowledge the "primacy" of the Bishop of Rome, Father Hanson said, as long as "primacy is understood as first among equals."

Anglicans, however, find the concept of papal infallibility — the teaching that the pope, acting *ex cathedra* or in his official capacity, cannot err on faith and morals — simply unacceptable,

Father Hanson said.

Nevertheless, the Vatican's response to ARCIC I clearly states that the Catholic Church expects the pope to retain infallibility.

"The Catholic Church believes that ... the pope, even acting alone, (is) able to teach, if necessary in a definitive way, within the range of all truth revealed by God," the Vatican's response stated.

Related to the question of papal infallibility are the dogmas on the Blessed Virgin Mary. ARCIC I found that these teachings "raise a special problem for those Anglicans who do not consider that the precise definitions given by these dogmas are sufficiently supported by Scripture."

Yet for a number of reasons, Father Hanson said he did not believe that Mary's place in the Catholic Church would become a major issue in further unity talks. Many Anglicans venerate Mary, he noted, and several Anglican and Episcopal churches are named after the Mother of God.

Indeed, the fact that both churches call Mary "Mother of God" represents a unity of belief about the most difficult

issue surrounding Mary — whether she, indeed, bore God incarnate, said Father John F. Hotchkin, director of Secretariat for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"I certainly share the hope that Mary would not be a stumbling block to unity," he added.

The two churches also hold different views on describing the nature of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

"The Catholic Church holds that Christ in the Eucharist makes himself present sacramentally and substantially when under the species of bread and wine these earthly realities are changed into the reality of his body and blood, soul and divinity," noted the Vatican's response to ARCIC I.

Anglicans, on the other hand, shy away from defining Christ's presence in the Eucharist so concretely, Father Hanson said. He noted that "both churches believe that Christ is really, truly objectively present," but that Anglicans believe the question of *how* Christ is present "is as great a mystery as how is the man Jesus of Nazareth the Christ."

Despite differences in the two churches' theologies of Eucharist, observers note that the sacrament itself may play a role in bringing Anglicans and Catholics together.

During the 1980s, the Anglican communion adopted a policy of allowing all baptized Christians — regardless of denomination — to receive the Eucharist on a regular basis.

And although the Catholic Church restricts Communion to baptized Catholics, it nonetheless allows the Eucharist to be distributed to Christians of other denominations if they have no access to a local minister of their own.

Thus, frequent marriages between Episcopalians and Catholics and the "open communion" policy of some parishes has made the experience of a Catholic/Anglican Eucharist a growing grass-roots phenomenon — whether officially approved or not.

Since both churches now officially recognize each other's baptism as valid, Father Hotchkin noted, the next logical step would be to recognize each other's Eucharist.

Still, much work must yet be done — especially with regard to holy orders — before the Catholic Church would officially accept regular intercommunion of Catholics and Anglicans, he said.

Observers continue to believe, however, that unity between the two churches is possible some day. Until then, both churches must honestly state their beliefs and intentions, Father Hotchkin commented.

"If we are going to disagree, let's know what we're going to disagree about," he said.

Contains material from Catholic News Service.

Pontiff exhorts Christians to foster unity

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Welcoming a British diocesan pilgrimage to the Vatican May 29, Pope John Paul II exhorted Christians to increase their prayers for Christian unity.

The brief papal audience with Catholics from the Diocese of Portsmouth, England, concluded a week that began with the first meeting between the Pope John Paul and Anglican Archbishop George Carey of Canterbury, England.

In his remarks to the Portsmouth group, the pope said, "despite the tests and trials of history, the bonds of union between Catholics in England and the Vatican were never altogether broken."

"We must now intensify our prayer for the progress of ecumenical understanding and cooperation so that all Christ's disciples can once more come together in the visible unity of the one body."