

FOURTH COLLOQUIUM OF ANGLICAN AND ROMAN CATHOLIC CANON LAWYERS

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The setting of the ancient Chapter Houses of St David's Cathedral and Llandaf Cathedral provided a conducive and reflective working environment for the fourth colloquium of Anglican and Roman Catholic canon lawyers as attention was turned to the question of Authority, previous colloquia having explored Church Property (1999), Clergy Discipline (2000) and Church Membership (2002).¹

Conscious of the shared sense of history and division which these cathedrals embody the colloquium met very much in the context of the agenda being explored by the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM). The Anglican co-secretary of IARCCUM, and longstanding member of the colloquium, the Revd Gregory Cameron (who was admitted and collated as an Honorary Canon of St Woolo's Cathedral, Newport, in the course of the colloquium) outlined the current thinking of IARCCUM as well as presenting the concept of canon law as a fifth instrument of unity. As such the colloquium had two distinct tasks: to explore the question of Authority and to offer IARCCUM further points for consideration in answer to a brief offered by IARCCUM in 2002.

First the issue of Authority was considered by papers exploring: Authority and Ordained Ministry; the Role of Laity in Governance; Sociology and the Practice of Authority; and Canonical Dimensions of the ARCIC Report 'The Gift of Authority'. Consideration of these issues aimed to provide a factual description and analysis of Anglican and Roman Catholic canon law; identification of similarities and differences; establishment of points of contact based upon shared canonical principles. The working assumption that canon law represents applied ecclesiology for the churches ensured that the conversations were set firmly in the context of honest dialogue which itself takes the goal of the unity of the Christian Church to be of supreme importance. When the unity of the Church is seen to be crucial to the effective and faithful mission of the Church it is clear just how significant conversations of this nature, and in this area of church life, actually are. As a first time observer from another ecclesial tradition, this was particularly well reflected as the conversations relating to authority provided a practical context to the second significant task of the colloquium.

¹ Reports may be found at (1999) 5 Ecc LJ 281, (2001) 6 Ecc LJ 61, and (2002) 6 Ecc LJ 403 respectively.

Further to the brief offered by IARCCUM to the Colloquium in 2002, to examine the range of possible ways, within current canon law provisions, to deal generously and pastorally with situations of inter-church marriages involving Anglicans and Roman Catholics, work was undertaken to consider two basic questions which helped to give a more specific focus to the brief:

- In working towards 'visible union', what steps are currently permitted by the canon law of our respective churches?
- What intermediate steps could be proposed?

These questions were asked of such fundamental aspects of church life as baptism, marriage, and eucharistic sharing. The issue of how these questions relate to the most obvious expression of church unity in a given community was also addressed in a section looking at local ecumenical structures. Given the essential nature of the prescribed areas it was inevitable that other matters for further consideration were noted. These included: the rights and obligations of all the Christian faithful; the teaching office and the exercise of authority, and, in particular, its relation to conscience; the sacrament of reconciliation; the sacrament of anointing; the regulation of popular piety, and the treatment of devotional objects; the duty to lead a holy life as applied to clerics, religious, families and single persons.

As work and conversations were undertaken on baptism, marriage, eucharistic sharing and local ecumenical structures, it was of particular note and significance that the study of canon law has considerable possibilities in offering a methodology and framework for ecumenical conversations. A systematic consideration of ecclesiastical law in relation to the areas considered at this and other colloquia can ensure a rigorous and comprehensive approach to issues which lie at the heart of disunity, thereby offering realisation of potential and actual unity. The guiding principle of these conversations as strengthening the rôle of canon law as an element of applied ecclesiology seems to this observer to offer a refreshing challenge not only to IARCCUM but to other ecumenical endeavours at all levels of church life. The quest for greater unity seems almost too important to be left to ecumenists, theologians, or canonists alone. The fruitful interaction of this series of colloquia offers both reinvigoration and challenge to some of the well worn, and often presumed, assumptions of ecumenical work. Further work on the possibilities of a new instrument of unity will be of considerable importance in a number of fields.