

IV. "THAT THEY MAY BE ONE"

Already, before PNG Independence, indigenous bishops were ordained, George Ambo, for the Anglican church, in 1960, and Louis Vangeke, for the RC church, in 1970, showing the maturity of the respective Communion. The Catholic bishop died in 1982, after having fulfilled various functions. Archbishop Ambo retired in 1990, but, before doing so, he made news by his appeal for a greater church unity in the country. It remains our task to sketch, now, church life over the last 30 years or so, up to 1991. We will mainly concentrate on the factors outside and inside PNG, which were bringing Romans and Anglicans closer together, to the fulfilment of Jesus' deep desire, when he prayed: "That they may be one" (John 17:21).

1. The Second Vatican Council

The papal election of October 1958, when Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, at the age of 77 years, was made Pope John XXIII, appeared, at first, to be a provisional measure, taken by prelates, who did not want to commit the church of Rome to one particular direction, for any length of time. But, as a matter of fact, by convening the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Pope John opened the windows of his church, not only for a much needed *aggiornamento*, but, also, for a basically new understanding of Christianity. This vision incorporated various fresh ideas, held by many bishops and theologians, over the past decennia, and was often inspired by the great Cardinal John H. Newman, sometimes called the "invisible expert" of the last Vatican Council.

As far as we are concerned, Pope John XXIII was well prepared for his new task, especially by his contacts with other churches in the Balkans, while he was still Apostolic Nuncio at Constantinople. He also had good collaborators, such as Cardinal

Augustin Bea, and, since 1960, various other people at the (Pontifical) Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. The impact of the Council depended much on its well-polished statements, the tune of which was set by the Constitution on the Liturgy, the first of all documents to be issued by Vatican II. One non-Catholic observer said, about the people who wrote the Council text, that “if this goes on much longer, they’ll find that they’ve invented *The Book of Common Prayer*”.²³

For outsiders, much of the Council’s success derived from the famous Decree on Ecumenism, and from the subsequent documents, which were added to it. Still, these papal and other statements, did not reach the public without a hitch. The first draft of the Decree on Ecumenism was prepared under Pope John, and sent out in March, 1963, that is, before the Second Session of the Council. But then, on June 3, the Pope died, and the whole enterprise was put into jeopardy.

It was of paramount importance, that on June 25, of the same year, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini became Pope Paul VI, a position he held for the next 15 years. He, too, was “a providential man”, who, from his student days, had shown great interest in Anglicanism, and during his time as Archbishop of Milan, became particularly well informed about the Anglican Communion (e.g., through Bishop George Bell). He decided to continue with the Council, and, during its Second Session, the Decree on Ecumenism was discussed, while, during the Third Session, the final text was promulgated. This happened on the very day that the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church received its publication (November 21, 1964).

The Vatican statement on the church, itself, *Lumen gentium* (as distinguished from the much-longer text *Gaudium et spes*, on the church in the modern world of 1965), is the proper framework to understand Rome’s new thinking about the relationship with other Christian bodies. We cannot, here, lift out all the passages, which

are interesting for ecumenists, but two quotes from the text may do. Thus, under n. 15, the document says:

“The church recognises that, in many ways, she is linked with those, who, being baptised, are honoured with the name of Christian. . . . For there are many who honour sacred scripture, taking it as a norm of belief, and of action. . . . They lovingly believe in God . . . and in Christ. . . . They are consecrated by baptism. . . . They also recognise and receive other sacraments within their own churches, or ecclesial communities. Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and cultivate devotion toward the Virgin Mother of God. . . .”²⁴

It is explained, here, by which kind of ties the church of Rome feels itself linked with non-Catholics, and that it recognises in them the action of the Holy Spirit. Hence, there can no longer be any talk that others have only to “return” to the church of Rome, or that they are only “outsiders”. They are real “brothers”, although separated from us now, and living in their own “churches, or ecclesial communities”. There is the implication that the RC church, too, needs improvement, according to the old saying, *Ecclesia semper reformanda*.

Worthwhile quoting, also are some passages from n. 10 and n. 12, which speak of “the priesthood of the believers”, and of the various tasks, which are found in the people of God. It says here:

“. . . the faithful join in the offering of the eucharist, by virtue of their royal priesthood. They, likewise, exercise that priesthood by receiving the sacraments, by prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy, life and by self-denial, and active charity.”²⁵

“The holy people of God also share in Christ’s prophetic office. It spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity, and by offering to God

a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips, which give honour to his name . . .”²⁶

In other words, there is no need to oppose any prophetic (read, “non-Catholic”) and sacerdotal (read, “Catholic”) understanding of Christianity, because the whole people of God partake in all Christ’s functions. The stress given to one, or the other, element of Christ’s message might differ in time and place, or from group to group, but allowances for this are possible within the one body of Christ.

Let us now come to the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, especially n. 3. Here, the church of Rome recognised, for the past ages, the guilt on both sides, and the impossibility of attributing the sin of erstwhile separation to those, who are now born in another ecclesial community. They are, through baptism, members of Christ’s body, while He finds ways and means to communicate to them all necessary graces. The same paragraph says:

“. . . these separated churches and communities, though we believe they suffer from defects . . . have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as a means of salvation, which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth, and entrusted to the Catholic church.”²⁷

It is clear that “Rome” does not sacrifice its own self-understanding, and that certain deficiencies it sees are not glossed over. Notwithstanding this stand, it has often been remarked that, whatever the Council affirmed, must be understood on the merits of each separate case. And here it is said of the Anglican church (n. 13):

“Among those, in which Catholic traditions and institutions, in part, continue to exist, the Anglican Communion occupies a special place.”²⁸

In n. 11 of the document on Ecumenism, one particular suggestion is made regarding the “hierarchy of truths”, of which one observer – nobody less than the Swiss theologian Oscar Cullman – stated that it was the most important point of the whole text, in view of (any) dialogue. It reads as follows:

“When making comparisons of doctrines, they should remember the existence of an order, or “hierarchy”, of the truths of Catholic teaching, since they differ, in their connection with basic Christian belief.”²⁹

Although it is not stated that any human logic, but rather, the person of Jesus Christ is the centre of all belief, the suggestion is most apt to distinguish what is of fundamental importance, and what touches the periphery only, thus allowing serious discussions to be held.

This conviction was the particular background why, in PNG, the Romans and the Anglicans could take seriously the many links formed between them over the years, so that, finally, there was scope to bring them closer to one another.

2. National Moves Towards Unity

Before addressing the bilateral conversations between the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans, it is necessary to underline that, in PNG, there has been an astonishing amount of multilateral contacts, and interchurch services. To mention only a few will contribute to the maintenance of a proper perspective of church unity aimed at, between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. We will concentrate on only three organisations: the Melanesian Council of Churches, the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools, and the Melanesian Institute. The first two are interdenominational in nature, while the third one constitutes a RC initiative, which soon became interdenominational (that is, grouping various denominations, or ecclesiastical bodies), and then began

contributing towards church unity, that is, becoming truly ecumenical.

General union talks began, in PNG, in the 1960s, when the drive towards forming an independent country grew in momentum, so that some people even talked about establishing “one national church”. The latter opinion was favoured by outsiders, that is by non-theologians, but also by ecclesiastics, who, out of their own experience, were accustomed to nationally-defined groups of Christians.

There were several results of the trend towards cooperation and unity. One dates back to 1956, when the Lutherans of Finschhafen (and their helpers from Australia) joined with the Lutherans of Madang (supported by the group of the Missouri Synod), and formed the Evangelical-Lutheran church of New Guinea (ELC-NG, or later, ELCONG). Before this, they also wanted to join the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), but later they withdrew from it.

Another amalgamation, was that of the United church of PNG and the Solomon Islands, which came out of the union of the Papua Ekalesia (ex-LMS and Kwato), the Methodist Synod, and the small United church for expatriates at Ela Beach (Port Moresby), and happened in 1968. In 1971, this group was the only Melanesian church to join the PCC. There were bilateral union talks between the Lutheran and the United churches in the mid-1970s, which, after producing papers on baptism and eucharist, were broken off, despite the insistence of the local Lutheran bishop.

A. The Melanesian Council of Churches

The first multilateral talks, for the Pacific Islands, began at a conference, held in May, 1961, at Malua, in Samoa. Serious union talks followed, locally, three years later. In these, the Anglicans and Lutherans favoured a federation of independent churches, while

other Christians tended towards an organic union of one new church. The practical result was that, in 1965, six bodies joined to form the “Melanesian Council of Churches” (MCC). They were the Anglican church, the Baptist Mission, the Evangelical-Lutheran church, the Salvation Army, the Methodist church, and the Papua Ekalesia. In the discussions then held, leading roles were played by Bishop David Hand, first chairman of the MCC, and also by Fr John Key, sometime Ecumenical Relations Officer of the Anglicans in PNG.

Church Affiliation in PNG Townships (10 years and older)				
	Citizens		Non-citizens	
	Total	%	Total	%
Anglicans	11,200	78.8	3,000	21.2
Baptists	2,300	82.1	500	17.9
Evangelical Alliance	9,500	95.0	500	5.0
Jehovah’s Witnesses	2,000	90.9	200	9.1
Lutherans	61,000	99.1	600	0.9
Roman Catholics	79,000	93.3	5,600	6.7
Seventh-day Adventists	17,500	98.8	200	9.1
United church	57,500	97.1	1,700	2.9
Others	4,000	76.9	1,200	23.1
Not stated	12,000	61.5	7,500	38.5

Source: 1980 National Population Census.

The nature of the MCC was somewhat unique, because of the inclusion of the Western Highlands Baptists, and of the Salvation Army, which showed that not only major churches came together. However, no contact was established with the PCC, founded in the early 1960s. Some reasons for this were – as the Anglicans said in 1972 – that PNG was large enough, and cohesive enough, to form a unit of the world church on its own, and that the expense of getting to the Eastern Pacific seemed unwarranted. In addition, the MCC had no official link with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, although a good working relationship with it was established. The history of the MCC makes it clear that, neither in 1964, nor later,

was a new super-church born, or that matters of theological doctrine, or ecclesiastical discipline, were swept under the carpet. Relations with Geneva were less in Melanesia than with the PCC. Yet, the friendly cooperation, then established, was full of promises for the future, and would justify this hope also.

The inclusion of the RC church is a story apart. Right from the start, its inclusion in the MCC was advocated by the Anglican Bishop, John Chisholm, who wrote, in 1964, to Dr Ian Maddocks, the Secretary of the Executive Group:

“There are some, who feel that, as this Melanesian Council is not affiliated with WCC, there is no reason why the RCs should not be invited to be members of it as well. Indeed, there would be quite a lot to be said, for it could, perhaps, be a real attempt at ecumenism, and it could be a guide to other territories and countries in the Christian world.”³⁰

It took a long time before the prophetic words of Bishop Chisholm were fulfilled, but, about six years later, it was so far. In the press release of March 24, 1971, Fr Key could announce, on behalf of the MCC, that the Roman Catholics, too, had decided “to accept the invitation to join, as a full member”. This followed the call of the MCC founding members, assembled in August, 1970, at Madang, and the decision of the CBC, gathered at Kensington (Sydney), in November of the same year. As a result, a RC representative, Fr Patrick Murphy SVD, attended the Annual General Meeting, held at the Baptist Mission of Baiyer River, in October, 1971.

The entry of the Roman Catholics happened, among other reasons, because of outside pressures, the main ones being the influence of the Second Vatican Council (see above), and also that of the, more or less, independent Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, in Rome. The later had called several international meetings, from 1967 onwards. Invitations came also to PNG, and at least the

Conference of 1979 was attended, by Fr John Anshaw MSC, the successor of Fr Murphy.

The Main Organisations Between the PNG Churches	
1915	Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF)
1957	Christian Radio Missionary Fellowship (CRMF)
1965	Melanesian Council of Churches (MCC)
1965	Heads of churches meeting
1969	Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS)
1970	Churches Education Council (CED)
1971	Melanesian Institute (MI)
1974	Churches Council for Media Cooperation (CCMC)
1975	Churches Medical Council (CMC)
1983	Word Publishing
1984	Christian Institute of Counselling (CIC)

On the local scene, the entrance of the RC Bishops' Conference into the MCC was an event of exceptional importance. It was thought at the time, that only the Christians of Trinidad and Tobago, in the West Indies, had made a similar step, but later it appeared that, at that stage, half-a-dozen RC hierarchies (including those of nearby Fiji and Vanuatu) had done the same already. Mgr Gino Paro, the Apostolic Delegate in Port Moresby, was most pleased that the Roman Catholics in this country could take such a decision. One can say that what had begun, some 50 years ago, among Protestants only, and had been kept at a distance by “Rome”, for such a long time, became now a fact of life among Roman Catholics in PNG. Following the lead of the 1910 Missionary Conference of Edinburgh, the specific evangelisation work in the country contributed greatly to this step.

B. The Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

Conscious cooperation with others, which surely led the RC church into the MCC, also had its effect in the rather-specialised field of theological education, when, in 1969, the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS) was set up. This happened, when the first post-war graduates were ready for tertiary education, and when several mainline churches faced the same problems with the formation of their future indigenous ministers. They proposed, among themselves, to clarify the level of theological formation achieved in their schools, and, if possible, to share the existing resources, and to face, in the same way, the challenges from secular education, and from the civil administration.

Noteworthy for PNG, is that, through the acceptance of the Christian Leaders' Training College, of Banz, where Evangelical ministers were trained, the Association was wider than the MCC. For the Anglican Communion, it incorporated the students, both from Dogura in PNG, from Kohimarama, in the Solomon Islands, and even a theological scheme from Northern Australia, in which several churches worked together.

Not all the possibilities of such an enterprise were widely realised, although some of them, for instance, the exchange of staff and students, were now and then practised. This included that RC lecturers from Holy Spirit Seminary, Bomana, gave courses at Newton Theological College, and that Anglican clerics from Port Moresby lectured at Bomana (with, on one occasion, an Anglican teaching Church History to the RC seminarians). Similarly several Anglican students were enrolled at Bomana, just as later, Anglican nuns went to the nearby Xavier Institute of Missiology.

C. The Melanesian Institute

Whereas the MCC and MATS were, from the start, ecumenical in outlook, and interested all major churches, we should

mention, here, one initiative, which first brought all Roman Catholics together, but eventually, also, became ecumenical in the usual sense. By this, we refer to the Melanesian Institute for Socio-Economic and Pastoral Service (MSPI), later shortened to the Melanesian Institute (MI).

The origins of this venture go back to the late 1960s (1968), when three RC sending societies – SVD, SM, and MSC – felt a need to better equip their foreign missionaries in PNG. It centred around greater appreciation of the native religion and culture, and was initially sponsored by the Association of Clerical Religious Superiors (ACRS), and later by the CBC. It was, therefore, natural that the first Orientation Course, held in November, 1969, was only for mission personnel, who were Roman Catholic, all male, and mainly clerical and religious, and not exceeding the ambit of the RC Bishops' Conference. In due time, the Melanesian Institute had its own publications, such as *Catalyst* and *Point*, and its proper facilities built at Goroka.

The Melanesian Institute saw a gradual opening up of the initiative, mainly because the same needs also existed across ecclesiastical boundaries. First, the CBC took over the venture; then the doors were opened for RC Sisters, then also for members of other denominations (both on the level of direction, funding, staff, and students), and eventually even for people of nearby countries. In other words, what was not ecumenical by purpose, became ecumenical in fact, and here the Anglican church was first represented, when, in 1978, Bishop Jeremy Ashton joined the governing body. Consequently, the Constitution was changed to make the Institute fully interdenominational. The founding members of the Institute were originally not evangelically minded, and leaned, rather, towards the mainline churches. However, as time went on, an observer of the Evangelical Alliance was invited to the Annual General Assembly, and, on another occasion, a couple of missionaries from the Churches of Christ attended one of the orientation courses.

The pastoral theological issues, which, for a time, were pushed back by the anthropological thrust of the Institute, came back later, for instance, with the projects of the RC Self-Study (1972), the Planning Survey of the Evangelical-Lutheran church (1976), the Seminar on Ministries in the Church, and the current studies of the Marriage and Family Life Project. In view of this development, Fr Ennio Mantovani, Director of the Institute, rightly noted how, within the group, the divisions, and the consensus, did not, necessarily, follow interdenominational lines. In consequence, the relativity of confessional distinctions became apparent, not on a theoretical, but on the experiential, level, so that theological pluriformity was experienced before it was being discussed theologically. In this way, too, the Melanesian Institute became a teaching ground of true ecumenism in PNG.

In short, we can say that various examples of church unity, such as the creation of the MCC, joint theological research, and common theological formation, are only a few of the instances where active cooperation was achieved. To these nationwide links, one can add, of course, many examples of practical cooperation on the local level. They range from Catholics giving hospitality to Anglicans in Bomana, or Alexishafen, for an annual retreat, or even, for a provincial synod, the joining of efforts by industrial chaplains, e.g., near the copper mine of Panguna, or, also, the reciprocity practised in catechetical instructions, especially between Anglicans and Catholics, whenever the minister of the other church was absent, or not available. All these incidents and groupings formed a web of links for practically uniting most Christians within PNG, and, also, for bringing together both “Rome” and “Canterbury”.

3. The Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission

While the Second Vatican Council made its impact on the church of Rome at large, and within the country, the MCC came about, and was even joined by the Roman Catholics. A further local initiative was started by Archbishop D. Hand. He made the

suggestion to the CBC, in July, 1970, to take the first concrete steps towards effective unity with the Anglicans. In doing so, the Archbishop repeated, on the national scene, what Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI had done, on a bigger scale, when they earlier agreed to establish "The Anglican/Roman Catholic Permanent Joint Commission" (from 1970, known as ARCIC, and now as ARCIC I).

The PNG group of theologians was known as "The Joint Commission of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in PNG". The meeting operated from November, 1970, to March, 1974. It had, as its permanent secretary, the RC, Fr P. Murphy, who, afterwards, too, remained ecumenical officer, till his accidental death in December, 1978.

Phrased for the general public, the purpose of the Joint Commission was to overcome ignorance of each other's life and doctrine, or, to say it with the more official text:

"to study theological matters, and to encourage a closer relationship between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in Papua New Guinea".³¹

There were, in all, 14 meetings, happening about every three months, spread out over three years, and bringing together three theologians of each church, and often, also, one consultant. Although the Anglican theologians were rather of the Catholicising tendency, the Anglo-Evangelical voice was also heard, albeit indirectly. On the request of the Moderator of the United church, the Revd Jack Sharp, the Revd Peter Wedde became a regular observer of the dialogue, although a move from the Commission, to change his status to that of a full-time member, was not followed through. Wedde contributed at least two published papers to the proceedings, and made many other interventions. To his voice, one can add a few Anglo-Evangelical documents, as the one emanating from Archbishop Loane, of Sydney, although it was observed, in the

Commission, that his diocese was unrepresentative of the theology of the Anglican Communion at large.

As said, above, there existed from the beginning, a link with ARCIC, often expressed in the perusal of existing study papers, or agreed statements, and heightened by correspondence with the Anglican secretary of ARCIC, the Revd Colin Davey, and by the visit of Archbishop Felix Arnott, of Brisbane, both Anglicans on ARCIC. Several Vatican documents were studied (e.g., the paper *Matrimonia mixta* of March, 1970), while the local Chargé d'Affaires, Mgr C. Faccani, also took an active interest in the various proceedings, and regularly informed the highest authorities in the Vatican of the progress made in PNG. In addition, there was substantial correspondence with people in Australia, the Pacific, Europe, and ARCIC, itself, so that many interested and authoritative persons abroad could follow the national religious dialogue.

Inside the country, publicity was one of the great concerns of the Commission. It enlisted the help of the Melanesian Institute (then preparing for the RC Self-Study of 1972), of the various RC Commissions for Ecumenism (e.g., in the dioceses of Mendi and Port Moresby), and also of the specialists from both denominations, engaged in catechetical training.

A consistent effort was made to ensure the cooperation of nationals, and, quite often, definite names were put forward. At one stage, it was even thought that there should be a parallel, local commission. In the end, it was recommended that the task of the Joint Commission should be taken over by a committee of indigenous people only.

There also were continuous efforts to fully inform, and to obtain the vital interests of, the PNG Bishops. Still, the 1972 questionnaire, addressed to all of them, received only five short answers, out of a total of about 20 copies distributed among the two hierarchies. One might think that this reflected the national



Archbishop David Hand.

situation, where the two churches were most unevenly distributed over the whole territory.

What, now, were the points the Joint Commission talked about? There is a list of over a dozen topics, which were discussed, but, practically, they can be reduced to the study of the four main sacraments: baptism, marriage, holy orders, and eucharist, to which one can add such a special case as the salvation offered through non-Christian religions.

At first, the Commission considered the various rites of baptism, with one RC paper on the degrees of incorporation into the church. The conclusion of this initial discussion was that each church should fully recognise the validity of the other church's baptism, as was actually also done.

The next discussion centred around the sacramentality of marriage, which, again, did not create any special problems. This cannot be said about the issue of mixed marriages. The latter were treated in reference to the Lambeth statements of 1948, the Roman

Motu Proprio of March, 1970, and the echoes this document had found in Germany and Switzerland. It was noted that “Rome”, for the first time, had given any attention to the partners’ consciences, but the team was still not happy with the insistence on “promises”, required for a RC baptism, and a RC education of the children. Here, the Anglican theologians advocated a complete choice of action for the parents concerned. All agreed, however, that, for mixed marriages, “dual ceremonies” should not be allowed, but that only one determined sacramental rite was to be followed.

Much more time was devoted to the problems associated with the ministerial priesthood. This issue included the topic of ordination, and the validity of the Anglican orders, the exercise of ecclesiastical authority, especially by the bishops, and, finally, the office of the Pope. More than half the papers, prepared for the Commission, touched upon these particular matters (some of them only affecting H. Küng’s 1964 book on Infallibility). Besides this, an irenic Anglican paper was worked out in reply to the RC opinions, while the Commission, as a whole, also prepared a two-column presentation of both positions (1972). In the latter, the Anglicans said, for instance:

“We look on the Papacy as a Presidency . . . *in* and not *over* the church. . . . The Pope would preside as *primus inter pares* amongst the bishops, involving a personal concern . . . for the affairs of the whole church . . . to express the mind of the whole church . . . holding a primacy of love . . . implying honour and service . . . to be a personal sign of the visible unity of the church . . . and the guarantor of the church’s pluriformity.”³²

The RC theologians did not accept that such a view was only based upon practical and empirical grounds. They said it was not merely given to the Pope by the church, meeting in a council, and not possessed by him according to the will of Christ, or not an essential element in his church. Still, they admitted that the Pope could make laws for the universal church, and they did not see any

great difficulty in having a centralised administration, as is now found in Rome.

It would appear that both groups often relied on their familiar "authorities", so that, on the Roman side, one detects the views on collegiality, found in Vatican II, or among RC theologians, while, on the Anglican side, one may see a reliance on what Lambeth 1968 had to say about authority in the church. It was also explained that, for an Anglican, it was possible to take a line similar to a RC line, but that it was equally possible, within the Anglican Communion, to adhere to other views of authority.

In general, one can maintain that the positions taken reflected the different nature of the two communions, one accustomed to greater uniformity, and the other used to more pluralism, or, also, one being a single worldwide organisation, and the other rather a family of individual Provinces, each one moving at its own pace, and having, among themselves, a more tenuous link of unity. In the PNG situation, the papacy, as such, did not seem to be an insurmountable difficulty, although people were not happy with the way in which this office was often exercised.

A last great topic of discussion, yielding nine position papers, was that of the eucharist, which was shown, in the words of Jean Tillard, to have an intrinsic link with the priestly ministry. The commissioners addressed the usual aspects of the real presence, the sacrifice of the Mass, the meaning of transubstantiation, and the different eucharistic rites in use.

Particular attention was given to the work done by ARCIC I, such as, the Windsor Statement of 1971, and the reactions it had called for from various theologians, including Archbishop Marcus Loane, of Sydney. In sum, the Commission welcomed the Windsor Statement for the advance it represented in the mutual understanding of the eucharist as a sacrament of unity. As regards "transubstantiation", it was made clear that the term was only ratified by the Council of Trent as a convenient designation of the

“wonderful exchange” taking place in the eucharist, and not as an explanation of this mystery. The Anglican group, on its side, pointed out that they did not wish to be tied down to any one explanation of Christ’s presence in the eucharist. Belief in the Real Presence was sufficient.

Almost the last paper presented concerned the possibility of the Holy See reexamining the validity of Anglican Orders. The two RC authors of this statement took a rather cautious position, while, subsequently, the bishops on both sides came out for a further study of this sore point, with Archbishop Hand arguing for a regional sacramental intercommunion, instead of the passive sacramental “hospitality”, which was upheld officially.

Several criticisms were made of this particular bilateral dialogue, even from among its own members. Here, it was said that the Commission lacked precise, proximate goals, and was becoming “an armchair exercise” of expatriate theologians – an opinion echoed in the definitive report of 1974, drawn up by the group’s secretary. Maybe one can agree that the lack of nationals in the discussions was the most serious defect of the deliberations. However, the small number of indigenous theologians, and, also, the nature of Anglicans in PNG (where, in the cities, expatriates form about one-fourth of their adherents) somehow explained this shortcoming.

In hindsight, one can add that not all evidence existing at the time was taken into account. Thus, one can recall the stand taken by Bishop de Boismenu, for his whole circumscription, in 1936, regarding the validity of baptisms administered in certain other missions. Furthermore, one looks, also in vain, for the RC statement, issued against Fr Feeney (on the topic of incorporation in the church), or for the theological essays prepared by the “groupe des Dombes”.³³

Another criticism might zero in on the traditional points of litigation between the two churches. Although Papal infallibility, and the legitimacy of Anglican orders, were considered, no mention

was made of the marial dogmas, such as Mary’s assumption to heaven, her immaculate conception, and the ancient belief in her perpetual virginity.

Regarding the procedure followed, one can say that the study of baptism by the Commission, was probably the right one for the Commission to gear up for its further discussions, while it was never the intention to present a first and comprehensive study of whatever could be of mutual interest. It was also no real disadvantage that, say, the nationality of the commissioners played a part in what, and how, things were discussed, because it still reflected the church life as it really was lived in PNG.

4. The Appeal of Archbishop Ambo

While, during the 1970s, the RC and Anglican theologians held their conversations, and subsequently various interchurch bodies maintained the links between the two ecclesiastical bodies, one has to wait till 1986 before another important event took place, when Archbishop George Ambo was nearing the end of his term in office. Before that, however, in 1980, Archbishop Hand had called for a new round of discussions between the two churches, but the RC bishops replied to wait till some indigenous priests had returned from overseas studies, so that these could be the ones involved in the dialogue.³⁴ We will start, therefore, with the more recent initiative of Archbishop Ambo.

George Ambo was one of the two teacher-catechists, who had escaped from the Lamington disaster, because, just then, they happened to be absent from the Sangara mission. Later, Ambo was ordained to the priesthood (1958), and served for two years at Boianai. In 1960, he became the first local Bishop of the Papua Northern Region, with residence at Popondetta, while, in 1983, he succeeded Archbishop Hand as first indigenous Archbishop of the Anglican Province of PNG. He was known for his catholic sympathies, no doubt confirmed by his rich pastoral experiences.



Bishop G. Ambo, with his wife Marcela, Kuron, c1970.

He showed his ecumenical interests, especially since he headed the Anglican Province of PNG, and once visited Pope Paul VI, when on his way to the Lambeth Conference of 1968.

He came into the news in early 1986, when the Anglican Synod, meeting at Dogura, wholeheartedly approved the ARCIC I agreements on eucharist, ministry, and authority in the church. At the time, the Synod also passed a recommendation to seek closer union with the RC church. In the following year, when the Archbishop, and his ecumenical officer, Fr Michael Hunt, attended the annual meeting of the CBC, at Bomana, he made the formal request that new discussions be held with the church of Rome, but now on the level of the higher authorities.

Recent events in the Anglican Communion, and also on the national scene, had convinced Archbishop Ambo that the church needed a stable authority, a function, which could be best exercised by the papacy. He saw no objection to acknowledging the Pope's universal primacy, which involved a certain degree of jurisdiction, as well. Other reasons for his move were his concern about isolated and scattered Anglicans in the RC areas, and his worries about the

inroads made by small fundamentalist sects everywhere. He, finally, wanted to put his limited resources for education and health work to the best use, although he admitted to the fear that his smaller group of about five percent of the total population could be swallowed up by the much-bigger RC church.

The move did not mean that, now, the Province of PNG wanted to leave the Anglican Communion, but, rather, that Anglicans wanted to associate themselves more closely with “Rome”, according to a pattern found already among Orthodox Christians, and ancient Oriental churches (in India) living in union with Rome. Consequently, his church could acknowledge the papal primacy, and still retain its own identity, e.g., in liturgy (sacraments and rites), and in church law (possibility of a married clergy, lay participation in the Synod, etc.). It was believed that the leeway allowed to an Anglican Province enabled the local church to go one step further than all other Anglican Provinces. It might even become a beacon for the rest of the world, so that, in due time, other Provinces, too, could follow the PNG example.

There was no secrecy about the 1987 initiative. Not only had successful theological discussions had already taken place (of which ARCIC had been informed), but the resolution passed at Dogura shared in the normal publicity given to all synodal decisions. This included that, now, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) had also been duly informed.

The address of the Archbishop to the CBC was practically the same as the Response formulated at the Anglican Synod a year earlier, although some national issues might have been added to it. Again, there might have been some reticence in passing on the information to the grassroots people. As a matter of fact, as wise pastors of their faithful, the bishops did not want to raise false expectations, especially, because the topic touched upon, fell in an area, where they knew that “Rome” progressed only cautiously.

The appeal did not immediately receive the warm approval of the RC bishops, maybe, not only because the CBC was made up of prelates from both PNG and the Solomon Islands, but also because the situation within the country was so different, with Anglican concentrations limited to only a few dioceses. There were also reactions pro and con in the national newspapers, and even some rumblings in the media overseas.

According to the *Post-Courier*, negative reactions were expressed by Bishop David Piso, of the Gutnius Lutheran church, and by Pastor Bert Godfrey, of the SDA church, to which one can add one issue of *The Protestant*, a leaflet produced by the Presbyterian Reformed church of PNG. The main worry here was that the existence of the papacy, was felt to be unscriptural. There also were some unfavourable words from the Pentecostal, or charismatic, side, including two articles printed in *Family*, the diocesan newsletter of the Anglican church. For the rest – as appeared from the defence made – the local reaction was rather positive.

An external event, however, complicated the issue, namely the consecration of the Revd Barbara Harris, who was made an Episcopalian Bishop in the United States (February, 1989). This raised, once again, the issue of the ordination of women, also discussed at the Lambeth Conference of 1989, but without achieving any unanimity. The discussions, then held, showed the privilege of the Anglican Provinces to move in their own direction. However, some newspapers in the United Kingdom (such as the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Spectator*) quickly predicted the end of the Anglican Communion, and interpreted the PNG rapprochement with the Roman Catholics as another crack in worldwide Anglican solidarity.

As a matter of fact, the two issues were not related, as Bishop Paul Richardson observed in the British *Church Times*. In addition, according to indigenous culture, the problem of ordaining women was hardly a local issue. Incidentally, it would not constitute a



Archbishop B. Meredith, at the consecration of Bishop W. Siba, Popondetta, 1990.

theological difference, separating Roman Catholics and Anglicans in PNG.

The appeal of Archbishop Ambo did find several supporters in the CBC, so that an episcopal commission was set up, including Bishops Peter Kurongku, Albert Bundervoet, Desmond Moore, and Raymond Kalisz, Archbishops of Port Moresby and Rabaul, and the Bishops of Alotau and Wewak. To this group, Archbishop Michael Meier, of Mount Hagen, was later added. They held their first meeting in February, 1989, together with the parallel commission from the Anglicans, which included Archbishop George Ambo, and Bishops Isaac Gadebo, Bevan Meredith, and Paul Richardson, respectively, of Popondetta, Port Moresby, Rabaul, and Aipo-Rongo (Mount Hagen).

At this first encounter, various topics were aired (such as the possibility of a joint theological formation), and some difficulties were brought forward (such as the validity of the Anglican orders). Regarding the latter, it was observed that the climate had changed since the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Apostolicae curae*, of Pope Leo XIII (1894). Nowadays – Bishop Richardson pointed out – the emphasis had changed from apostolic succession to unity in faith, from defect of intention to community of belief, so that there were new hopes for an official recognition from Rome. Even so, some Anglican prelates were prepared to accept conditional reordination, if this would serve the cause of church unity.

The issue of the ordained ministry was felt, however, to be too big to be resolved by the PNG commission, mainly because it touched upon an area where “Rome” would decide the issue. Further on, the Commission saw the need to operate through a smaller consultation committee, made up of six people only: two bishops and a theologian from each side, delegated to coordinate studies, and to examine practical schemes of cooperation, and other possibilities for unity at the national level. It was asked to invite, for the next encounter, some experts from what, since 1989, was known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, while a letter was also considered, to ask guidance from Rome to lead the future deliberations.

The second meeting was held five months later, and was much bigger. In addition to the regular members, there were two RC consultants, Mgr Kevin McDonald, Roman representative for Anglican matters, and Bishop Basil Meeking, who, before being appointed to Christchurch, had worked some 20 years for the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. There were also two Archbishop observers from the Solomon Islands, the Anglican, Amos Stanley Waiaru, and the RC, Adrian Smith. Mgr McDonald clarified the value of various reports and statements, which could be construed as representing the official Roman answer to ARCIC I. Furthermore, he told the group that all existing schemes of union (e.g., from South India), were *ad hoc* solutions, while the existing

Roman pronouncements were intended for Roman Catholics only. In the PNG case, however, the two churches were at one in their approach to “Rome”, while RC headquarters were ready to deal with the local situation separately.

The main proposal from the second meeting was to work out a joint statement of faith, to be tested against the Council for Unity, and aimed at stimulating a reaction, leading to a reexamination of all implications. “The onus is on PNG” – Mgr McDonald said – “to move forward, since Rome cannot be expected to have the local knowledge, enabling it to indicate the way forward.” The Roman expert also said that, if there was official agreement on the ministry and the eucharist (as implied by ARCIC I), there would be a new context for seeing the Anglican orders in the light of living faith, and, thus, a reason to reassess them.³⁵

From various sides at the meeting, including Archbishop Bundervoet, and Bishops Gadebo and Meeking, it was stressed that the Commission’s ideas should first be tried out in their own restricted group, and bring them to the clergy, and the people, only afterwards. One of the consultants added that, not only theological, but also practical and historical considerations had to be respected, and that no steps could be made locally, apart from the rest of the church. In general, the two consultants were impressed, and happily surprised, by the degree of unanimity and realism shown at the meeting.

In the end, the Commission decided to call for an expert from the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) to sound out his reactions, while meanwhile, work should be done on a confession of faith, agreeable to the two sides, a task given to Archbishop Bundervoet, and to Bishop Richardson. The July meeting was also used to finalise a common pastoral letter of all the bishops present, to be issued on occasion of the publication of the Tok Pisin Bible, later in the year. There would be two editions of the Bible, one, without the apocrypha or deuterocanonicals, and one, according to the expressed wishes of the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans. The second

edition would include the seven disputed books of the Old Testament (as had also been the case with the original King James Version of 1604). The circular was a proper sign of a common belief, expressed in the face of many small evangelical groups, who totally rejected the “apocrypha”.

The third general meeting of the Commission was held in October, 1989, with, as visitor, the Revd Donald Anderson, the associate secretary for ecumenical affairs of the ACC. Immediately before the meeting, Archbishop Bundervoet had prepared an 11-page, closely-typed statement of faith, while Bishop Richardson had produced a three-page declaration of belief, and Bishop Moore added a two-page historical note, to serve as a provisional introduction. All this work had been discussed at a meeting of the subcommittee, held at Goroka, some time in March, 1989. Since then, the Archbishop of Rabaul had died, and the chair had been taken by Bishop Richardson.

It is interesting to note, at this point, that Archbishop Bundervoet, whose Marian devotion is beyond any questioning, did not touch upon this topic at all. This might just have been an oversight, or following from the fact that the paper closely followed ARCIC I. On the other hand, the Anglican paper recalls the point that, in their communion, “the Mother of Our Lord is invoked in such devotions as the ‘Hail Mary’”. This detail would surely indicate that, in PNG, mariology is not sensed to be a point of divisions.

Dr Anderson, in his address to the third meeting, approved of the “fast-lane strategy”, embarked upon by PNG, and found some parallel instances with union schemes between Anglicans and other churches in New Zealand, Malaysia, and Tanganyika. He also encouraged what was happening on the level of Anglican-Roman Catholic relations in PNG. On the other hand, Bishop Richardson quoted similar remarks from Bishop Mark Santer, of the ARCIC II team, while he did not fear to change relationships with other

Anglican Provinces, as long as the local church kept in touch with the rest of the Anglican Communion.

As to the next move, the prepared documents were to be sent to Rome, from where further advice would be expected. Thus, Mgr McDonald's letter of August 20, 1990, arrived, recommending that PNG Anglicans should require from the Commission the exact type of unity they desired. This is, then, as far as the dialogue on episcopal level has now progressed.

There have since been no further meetings of the whole Commission, although unilateral gatherings have been held by the Catholic bishops, e.g., in Goroka, and at their annual general meeting (where they are briefed by Bishop Richardson). The Anglican bishops, on their turn, met at various provincial synods, and also, more informally, at the centenary visit of Archbishop George Carey, of Lambeth, in August, 1991. Hence, the work is still progressing on the draft reply to the Vatican authorities.

While the authorities were gearing up for a new round of talks, other conversations happened on the local level. One occurred in August, 1989, when Archbishop Bundervoet visited the far end of New Britain, and had three sessions of talks with a dozen RC and Anglican clergy, in Kilenge. For the occasion, he used the well-known *ARCIC Catechism* of E. Yarnold and H. Chadwick, which addresses the traditional disagreements between Rome and Canterbury: eucharist, ministry, and authority. As stated in the minutes (in the section about ministry), one can repeat that there seemed to be no deep divisions of opinion, but rather an obvious wish to proceed along the lines of ARCIC.

Something along the same lines went on for months in Port Moresby, under the guidance of the RC parish priest in Boroko, and his Anglican counterpart at St John's, in Port Moresby. Here, too, the *ARCIC Catechism* was the guiding text, while a special newsletter was about to appear, when, by mere coincidence, the two movers of the conversations were transferred to other localities. To

these encounters one can also add discussions about the so-called “Lima Document” on baptism, eucharist, and ministry, issued by the World Council of Churches (1982), which was discussed at length, e.g., by the Eastern Highlands Churches’ Council at Goroka, some time in the mid-1960s. Here, too, Anglicans and Roman Catholics took an active part in the proceedings.

On a more-individual level, contacts became more frequent all the time. In Port Moresby, for instance, Anglican clergy join the Roman Catholics in their monthly gatherings in one of the town’s parishes. Personal invitations to ordinations and installations, or, also, to synods and Bishops’ Conferences are not unusual. Occasionally, even a RC priest preaches the annual retreat of his Anglican confreres, or both groups share pulpits, while the use of the same church buildings is not infrequent. There is at least one case where Catholics have contributed to the rebuilding of an Anglican parish centre.

Seen individually, one is surprised to see so many initiatives happen, or also come and go, and are being influenced by the presence, or absence, of certain particular personalities. Yet, viewed over a longer period of time, one cannot but admit that, under the surface, something is boiling, finding, every so often, a way to express itself.

The Revd Rufus Pech has drawn attention to the fact that, in Melanesia, the myth of the two estranged brothers has always been of pervasive importance. Maybe, this is, then, the reason why, time and again, unity across ecclesiastical borders becomes, here, more important than whatever kind of confessional distinctions have been erected, based upon past European history, and separating the sister-churches of “Rome” and “Canterbury”.

Conclusion

The last segment of the history of Romans and Anglicans in PNG is most interesting, because it has occurred within living history, and because it shows a new rapprochement, when ecumenical initiatives, elsewhere in the world, rather tend to slow down. Let us sum up the main lessons of this recent period.

The most important event of this era is the call of Pope John XXIII for a universal Council, where many old standing practices and attitudes were updated to match modern times. There was a greater appreciation for the earthly realities, for the value of non-Christian religions, and – in the RC church – there occurred a new awareness that exaggerations and mistakes had been made in the past.

Together with this appreciation for non-Christians, there also grew a much more positive attitude towards non-Catholics, and particularly toward the Anglican Communion. The repercussions almost caused a crisis in the mission fields, where a further expansion was stalled, but, at the same time, many schemes of inter-church collaboration took place. In PNG, most schemes were undertaken, in line with the convictions held by the World Council of Churches, and not those of the Evangelical Alliance, although Melanesia is special, in keeping its door open for some less-liberal churches, and ecclesiastical communities as well.

The amicable relationships with the Anglican Communion grew very much, in this time, so that both theologians and church authorities came together for discussions and dialogue. In fact, a chance for real unity became possible, and grassroots encounters did happen occasionally.

Especially since the appeal by Archbishop Ambo, concrete steps have been multiplied, including the fact that ecumenical experts from both Rome and Canterbury have visited the country,

and watched the progress made. It is now time to formalise, and bring to a good end, the communion started in these ways.