

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

One of the sad features of the history of the Christian church is the way in which relations between the different denominations have often been marked by bitterness and conflict. The memory of past disputes is still with us, and can provide an obstacle to the search for Christian unity.

However, in his survey of Roman Catholic-Anglican relations in PNG, Fr Theo Aerts has shown that, even in the days before Vatican II and the modern ecumenical movement, we can find examples of friendship and cooperation between the two churches. When Fr Michael McEnroe left Port Moresby in 1942 to join the army, he handed over the keys to the RC chapel at Bomana, for safe keeping, to the rector of St John's Anglican church, telling him to carry on. Yet this was the time when Catholics and Anglicans were officially not allowed to pray together! It is the memory of such incidents, in the past, which has helped foster such warm and close relations between Catholics and Anglicans in PNG today. Particular note should be taken of the friendship between Bishop de Boismenu and three successive Anglican bishops: Sharp, Newton, and Strong.

Although one of the two pioneer Anglican missionaries to PNG was an evangelical, the ethos of the church in this country has been overwhelmingly Anglo-Catholic. No doubt, that has made it easier for Anglicans and Catholics to understand each other better. Looked at from the outside, the two churches must appear very similar in theology and spirituality. The Anglican church is much smaller than the Catholic church in PNG, and possesses less in the way of material resources. It is more localised, and still heavily concentrated on the north coast of Papua. All this means that, in the search for unity, there are bound to be fears, among some Anglicans, that they will be taken over by a much more powerful sister church.

But unity clearly is our Lord's will for His church, and, given their closeness in theological outlook, it is a goal that Anglicans and Catholics in PNG surely have a duty to pursue together. The fearful

should remember that union does not mean absorption, and that no less a figure than Pope Paul VI has paid tribute to the patrimony of the Anglican church, and expressed the hope that this rich spiritual treasure will be preserved in any future reunion.

A much-respected figure, Archbishop Sir George Ambo appealed for Catholic-Anglican unity in an address to the Catholic Bishops' Conference, which Fr Aerts describes. Following that address, bishops of the two churches have entered into a dialogue, which has also involved Rome and the Anglican Consultative Council. Despite some misrepresentation in the press, this is a development that has been welcomed in the very highest levels of both churches, as offering a possible way forward at the local level that could have much wider implications for the search for unity. The origins of the present negotiations go back to a special Catholic-Anglican Commission in PNG, which was set up in the early 1970s. The reports of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission have had an important role in stimulating and guiding the discussions in this country.

Before any final decision about closer unity between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in PNG is taken, there will have to be the widest possible consultation in both churches. In the case of the Anglicans, this will mean debate in diocesan synods. Parish councils and clergy gatherings will all need to discuss the issue. For this, the essay of Bishop Santer, in the appendix, is very useful, although he did not write it with the Melanesian situation in mind. Still, the moment has come that nationals have to address the practical issues, which divide the two churches. They have now the task to heal the memories of the past. Fr Aerts has given all of us a very valuable background survey to help us get to know each other better. I hope that what he has written will be widely read, by both Anglicans and Catholics in PNG (and overseas), as we try to see how, in obedience to our Lord's will, we can grow closer together.

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