

APPENDIX F

**CHURCH OF IRELAND RESPONSE
TO
“DOMINUS IESUS” AND THE “NOTE” FROM THE
CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH**

INTRODUCTION

“The Church’s constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure* (or *in principle*).” (*Dominus Iesus* Introduction 4) This sentence sums up the purpose of the document issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on August 6th 2000. As such this is a significant explication of the limits that have been set for Roman Catholic Interfaith dialogue. Its emphasis on the person of Christ and on the incarnation will be something with which most churches would concur, even though in some instances wishing to set the limits of religious diversity less rigidly.

This response is not concerned with the issue of interfaith dialogue, except to remark that it is unfortunate that issues of ecumenical relationships between churches (whose members are baptised into Christ) should be linked to issues of relationships between Christianity and other faiths. This is to undervalue the real measure of *communio* that already exists between those who have been baptised as Christians.

THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES

The document *Dominus Iesus* does not say anything new with regard to the way in which the Roman Catholic Church understands itself. The section *Unicity and Unity of the Church* (IV:16,17) stresses the uniqueness of the Roman Catholic Church and that the single Church of Christ subsists in that Church. This is clearly found in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council. It then goes on to express a distinction between those Churches on the one hand which retain the apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist where the Church of Christ “is present and operative”, and on the other those “ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery” which it further says are “not Churches in the proper sense”. The conclusion to this section is quite blunt “The lack of unity among Christians is certainly a *wound* for the Church; not in the sense that she is deprived of her unity, but “in that it hinders the complete fulfilment of her universality in history”.

It is this small section of the document (IV, 16,17) which raises difficulty for the Church of Ireland, and indeed one could venture to say for most churches with a real ecumenical commitment. It is this section that links naturally to the Note on the use of the terminology “Sister Churches” which has provoked such strong reaction. Before turning to the Note, it is worth reflecting on the section as a whole.

Those who say that through the issue of *Dominus Iesus* that nothing has changed in the official documents of the Roman Catholic Church may be strictly correct. However it raises the whole question as to the adequacy of the use of doctrinal statements as effective tools for ecumenical relations.

THE USE OF HISTORIC AND CONFESSIONAL STATEMENTS

Churches with confessional statements and historic formularies (Reformed, Anglican or Lutheran) framed in the early days after the Reformation frequently find that the terminology, and indeed the tone, of these statements are unhelpful to modern theological dialogue, and generally desist from using them in dialogue. Such a recognition enabled Lutheran Churches to reach a new agreement with the Roman Catholic Church in 1999 on the Doctrine of Justification. In the same spirit, the General Synod of the Church of Ireland in 1999 passed a resolution stating:

Historic documents often stem from periods of deep separation between Christian Churches. Whilst, in spite of a real degree of convergence, distinct differences remain, negative statements towards other Christians should not be seen as representing the spirit of this Church today.

The Church of Ireland affirms all in its tradition that witnesses to the truth of the Gospel. It regrets that words written in another age and in a different context should be used in a manner hurtful to or antagonistic towards other Christians.

The documents of Vatican 2 were framed likewise in the very early days following the entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the modern ecumenical movement. One should ask whether they really provide an adequate basis for ecclesiology thirty years later in the light of the way that the Roman Catholic Church has moved in its relationships with all major Christian traditions, especially at the local level.

THE TONE OF *DOMINUS IESUS*

The tone of both *Dominus Iesus* and the Note with reference to Sister Churches does not reflect the manner in which ecumenical partners enter into dialogue today. The English Roman Catholic journal, *The Tablet*, in an editorial on 9th September 2000 concludes: “What a pity that it sounds notes of triumphalism that the sympathetic style and way of acting of Pope John XXIII, newly beatified, seemed to have dispelled for good”. This is borne out by some senior Cardinals who have distanced themselves from it to a greater or lesser extent. Cardinal Martini of Milan suggested that the tone “risks being rather strong” and that it should be read in the context of the “wider and more encouraging framework of *Ut Unum Sint*”. Cardinal Konig, formerly of Vienna, wished that the document “could perhaps have been expressed more politely and could have reflected a greater eagerness for dialogue”. Papal statements since the issue of these documents may indeed have affirmed their content, but have been reflected a much warmer and fuller commitment towards ecumenism.

CHURCHES AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNIONS

Another disturbing element in *Dominus Iesus* is the manner in which the term “church” is denied to some Christian communions and ascribed to others. It is of course difficult for Anglicans to know exactly where they belong on this scale of ecclesial correctness. Preserving a historic episcopate but without the papacy would place Anglicans in the same category as the Orthodox. In the very arbitrary definition of the rectitude of Eucharistic doctrine, then one might say that, in the light of the official response by the Vatican to the Report of the first Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission, questions have still to be

answered. Such sharp distinctions undermine the ecumenical endeavour. This has been well expressed by Bishop Eero Huovinen of the Church of Finland in a statement issued following the publication of *Dominus Iesus*. He speaks of the possible obstacle in this distinction “to equal partnership” and of the “lack of mutual respect in ecumenical dialogue”. He continues “It is my hope that old wounds will not be opened again. In a situation like this it would be important to rather seek for what unites than to remind of disagreements.”

Ecumenical study in ecclesiology involving all our Churches approaches ecclesiology from an understanding of the whole people of God rather than with definitions of hierarchy. The basis for this work is the sacrament of Baptism rather than the validity of ordained ministry. *Dominus Iesus* reverses this process by its negative conclusions based entirely on issues of holy orders and the eucharistic theology of one tradition.

SISTER CHURCHES

The Note on Sister Churches arises naturally out of these issues. It was issued shortly before and entered the public domain at the same time, though for more limited circulation. It is stated to be “authoritative and binding”. The terminology “*sister churches*” has been used chiefly in relation to the Orthodox Churches, but also on occasions with regard to Anglicans and indeed other Churches as well.

The Note examines the way in which the term was used in the early centuries between the different patriarchates, whilst contending that Rome never accepted that it held merely a primacy of honour among them. It shows that by the twelfth century, the other Patriarchs were protesting that Rome was merely their sister whilst Rome was contending that it was *mother and teacher*. The Note goes on to show that in more recent times John XXIII did speak of the Orthodox as *sister Churches*, following the use of the term by the Patriarch of Constantinople. This was then incorporated into the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and further used by Paul VI, and occurs again clearly in *Ut unum sint* issued by John Paul II. But it is at this point that the use of the term is clarified in a very narrow way. Section II:10 reads:

“In fact, in the proper sense, *sister Churches* are exclusively particular Churches (or groupings of particular Churches; for example, the patriarchates or metropolitan provinces) among themselves. It must always be clear, when the expression *sister Churches* is used in this proper sense, that the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Universal Church is not sister but *mother* of all the particular churches.”

It appears that the only interpretation allowed of the term “sisters” is that which a mother would use in addressing her daughters, and has nothing to do with being sisters (and brothers) in Christ, but merely sisters of each other, and certainly not sisters of the parent.

This is further developed to show that it can be used of other particular churches (as well as the Orthodox) who are sisters of other particular churches but certainly not of the Roman Catholic Church. This is developed to show that one should not speak of “*our two churches*” in respect of the Roman Catholic Church and any other single Church, as this would even obscure the credal statement concerning one holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. The final paragraph states again that *sister churches* can only be used in a proper sense “for those ecclesial communions that have preserved a valid episcopate and Eucharist”.

It could be contended that this Note does indeed change things. It officially limits the interpretation of the often used term *sister churches* in such a manner as to change the way in which it has generally been understood in ecumenical theology. It can be argued on the basis of the teaching that the fullness of the Church subsists in the Roman Catholic Church that it is impossible for there to be sister churches, and this is precisely what the Note has done. However such an argument merely raises once more the question whether this statement of Roman Catholic ecclesiology actually is adequate to where the Roman Catholic Church is today in ecumenical work and dialogue.

THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

The interpretation of the use of the term *sister churches* to churches which are siblings of each other, but daughters of Rome cannot be supported by the way that Pope Paul VI spoke of the Anglican Communion as an “ever-beloved sister”. He did not speak of “sisters” implying that the Anglican Communion was a group of siblings of which the Church of Rome was mother, but rather of an “ever-beloved sister”. Who was sister to whom? The answer is obvious and the Pope was hardly ignoring the use of the term as it had apparently according to the Note always been understood and giving it an entirely new meaning. The Note seems to be the novel interpretation in this context.

The sadness for Anglicans in all this is not that they have apparently been denied this special status which they had thought was somewhat akin to that given to the Orthodox Churches, but rather that this is a negative marker on that whole ecumenical endeavour including the Roman Catholic Church. A special relationship between Anglicans and Roman Catholics that was recognised at one time should not be seen as a barrier to wider ecumenical effort, but rather an affirmation that all progress towards the healing of ancient divisions is a step on the road to greater unity.

RECENT ECUMENICAL PROGRESS

We rejoice in the progress that has been made in our conversations with the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Reformed Churches, the Baptist Churches, the Methodist Church, and the Lutheran Churches. This dialogue with the Lutheran Church has in several regions led to full communion. We give thanks for the United Churches that Anglicans have entered and for the many new dialogues being explored, including the work of the Commission on Faith and Order.

The most recent encouragement on the road to unity between Anglicans and Roman Catholics was the meeting of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops from thirteen countries convened by Cardinal Cassidy of the Vatican Council for Christian Unity and the Archbishop of Canterbury in May 2000 at Mississauga near Toronto. The official statement begins by talking of meeting in the year 2000 with the challenge of international debt and states: “we are aware of the need to leave behind all past deficits with which our churches have themselves been burdened, so as to enter the new millennium renewed in deepening unity and peace.” The message of the Consultation is expressed in one sentence “we feel compelled to affirm that our communion together is no longer to be viewed in minimal terms”. But the official statement also sets out the stage of communion that has been reached between Anglicans and Roman Catholics and this is quoted in full (Section 9):

“The marks of this new stage of communion in mission are: our trinitarian faith grounded in the scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds; the centrality of Christ, his death and resurrection, and commitment to his mission in the Church; faith in the final destiny of human life; common traditions in liturgy and spirituality; the monastic life; preferential commitment to the poor and marginalised; convergence on the eucharist, ministry, authority, salvation, moral principles, and the Church as Communion, as expressed in agreed statements of ARCIC; episcopacy, particularly the role of the bishop as symbol and promoter of unity; and the respective roles of clergy and laity.”

What is significant is that this Mississauga Statement represents the tone of ecumenical work and relationships, and though expressed in theological terms here represents a great deal of the type of relationships that are developing between our two Communion at the local level, and at the national level.

It is natural that Anglicans will want to build on the relationships expressed in this Statement, but not so as to separate Anglicans from other Churches with whom we are in conversation, but rather as seeing each step towards the healing of the divisions of the Church as part of God’s purpose for the Church and indeed for humankind. This is part of what we in the Church of Ireland see as a response to living in a society crying out for reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

The tone of the Note and indeed of the Statement *Dominus Iesus* reflects little of the journey on which we believe that God is bringing us together as Christians, and though we can understand it from a merely academic point of view, we would wonder what it will achieve for the healing of the divisions of the Church. For the Church of Ireland, this document coming soon after the statement *One Bread, One Body* causes substantial difficulty in maintaining the momentum of ecumenical progress.

Our prayer and wish is that it will not damage the growing awareness of the unity that has already been achieved through our Baptism into Christ, and our sharing in a common goal in the ecumenical movement. Such a growing unity we believe to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Growth towards unity is being experienced in parts of Ireland, and it is on these foundations that we would seek to build.

October 2000

APPENDIX G

INTER-CHURCH CONSULTATION ON *DOMINUS IESUS*

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHURCH OF IRELAND RESPONSE

*The Most Reverend Dr Robin Eames,
Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland*

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

I have rarely if ever come to an inter-Church gathering with a heavier heart or more troubled mind. I feel sad that this meeting is necessary. As an Anglican and a convinced ecumenist I believe that the pilgrimage of Christians towards full understanding of each other's views is not of our making. It is a response to the call of Christ. That pilgrimage has at times been painfully slow – at times its speed has been breathtaking. But it has I believe been marked by growing maturity – and nowhere more clearly than here in Ireland. Through dialogue at the highest level and co-operation at parish level has come humility. With dialogue has come new evidence of trust. With dialogue has come a new *koinonia*. But dialogue depends on human language and human thought forms. It is therefore disappointing when the frailty of language exposes attitudes which can be perceived to place obstacles to that greater understanding rather than encouragement to greater understanding of God's purpose for His Body, the Church.

In presenting the official Church of Ireland response to *Dominus Iesus* I find myself addressing the issue on two levels. Here at home in the Church of Ireland we have rejoiced as co-operation and shared understanding have become so visible in the realities of everyday experience of inter-Church witness. Things are possible today which would have been unthinkable when I was ordained. Friendship between clergy at all levels has never been more visible. Over the past 30 years in Northern Ireland events which could have divided have often had the effect of drawing us closer together.

But I also address this discussion as a Primate of the Anglican Communion. At that international level conversations, dialogue and discussions over the years have produced so much which is valuable, so much which is worthwhile and so much which has shown us the will of the Spirit for the Churches. I am certain that when the Primates of the Anglican Communion meet in the United States next March under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Canterbury we will be considering the document at that international level.

Let me now try to 'speak the truth in love' from a Church of Ireland perspective. Copies of the Church of Ireland Response are available for you all.

1. As Anglicans we were encouraged by the positive nature of the Anglican-Roman Catholic consultation at Mississauga, Toronto, earlier this year. It had been convened by Cardinal Cassidy and the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Official Statement spoke of the participants' profound sense of 'spiritual communion'. It said that those who had participated believed that our two communions had 'reached a very significant new place on our journey'. There was also reference to a 'new stage of communion in mission'. This heartening sense of hope for the future seemed to

have brought some warmth into what many had felt was an ‘ecumenical winter’. But that hope was not to last for long because of the declaration, *Dominus Iesus*.

2. So much of *Dominus Iesus* is devoted to the relationship between Christianity and other faiths and we feel it is inappropriate that relationships between the Churches should be dealt with in that context. However we acknowledge and can identify with, the emphasis in *Dominus Iesus* on the uniqueness of the Christian revelation in the context of inter-faith relations, even if it is put somewhat starkly.
3. The general tone of *Dominus Iesus* is in fact surprisingly uncompromising. It does not reflect the atmosphere and manner in which we have become accustomed to relate to one another and certainly reflects nothing of the tone of the *Mississauga Statement*.
4. *Dominus Iesus* appears to us simply to restate the position of the Roman Catholic Church on its understanding of the Church, as enunciated by Vatican II. Disappointingly it does not show any sign that all the ecumenical dialogue since then has made any impact on Vatican thinking. Indeed the decades since Vatican II have been marked by so much inter-Church dialogue – both bilateral and multilateral – that they might even be described in historical terms as an ‘era of dialogue’. But in what way has this in fact borne fruit in the SCDF’s understanding of the Church? What influence has all this dialogue had on Vatican thought processes? Apparently none.
5. *Dominus Iesus*, like *One Bread One Body*, seems to us to be quite out of touch with attitudes in general. Many Roman Catholics have spoken to us of their embarrassment by these documents. These texts appear to us to be out of touch with the *sensus fidelium* and they clearly are out of touch with our times. Some people have now sadly questioned – and even worse, doubted – the point of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. That is nothing less than a tragedy.
6. The central thrust of *Dominus Iesus* in terms of ecclesiology is that those Churches which Rome does not think have preserved a proper ministry and sacraments are not proper Churches. Rome is the standard and the more like Rome one is the more authentic as a ‘Church’ one is. But no Church can claim that degree of perfection.
7. Is it possible to be the Church only to a certain degree as Vatican II’s ecclesiology holds? Can there really be degrees of ecclesialness? Rome recognises our baptism and calls us Christians. Yet, how can there be Christians who are not fully part of the Body of Christ, the Church? It is our view that the ecclesiology of Vatican II is flawed in this way. That flaw was repeated in *One Bread One Body* and now has been repeated in *Dominus Iesus*. But people generally, even many Roman Catholics, are discovering how wrong the basic Vatican II ecclesiological presuppositions are.
8. We welcomed Vatican II because it was a significant advance on what had gone before, but not because we agreed with all that it said. It is not for any Church to try to determine the boundaries of the Church of God by juridical means. The Church is in fact determined not by being in communion with any human being but by being ‘in Christ’. There is mystery to this and for that reason the Church and its boundaries are better discerned by us rather than determined by us.

9. Vatican II encouraged and even inspired a previous generation. But what encourages and inspires one generation will not necessarily do the same for the next. Actual ecumenical movement is vital, for without it we quite simply have ecumenical stagnation.
10. Where is *Dominus Iesus* taking us? What does it say to an increasingly sceptical world? It surely does not so much speak of Christians loving one another but rather more of Christians judging one another. Is that what we want to show the world? Is that the message that we want to give the world – a Christianity that is not even at ease with itself let alone with the rest of the world? Surely not.
11. What is the vision for ecumenism that underlies *Dominus Iesus*, if it is not simply to be a case of returning to the Roman fold? Ecumenical dialogue has not been marked by that kind of demand and it would be highly unfortunate to say the least if that is in fact the underlying message of *Dominus Iesus*. Without exaggerating we would then have to sit down and re-map the entire ecumenical landscape. That is surely not where any of us wants to be.

APPENDIX H**CONSULTATION ON *DOMINUS IESUS*****REPORT**

Representatives of the four main churches in Ireland met on 5 December 2000 to discuss the recent document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*. The meeting was chaired by the Most Rev Sean Brady, Archbishop of Armagh, and the Rev Dr Ian Ellis, Chairman of the Irish Council of Churches. The four main speakers were Fr Bernard Longley (secretary, unity committee of Catholic Bishops' Conference, England & Wales), Archbishop Robin Eames, Dr Trevor Morrow (Presbyterian Moderator) and Dr Norman Taggart (former Methodist President). Fr Longley explained the status of the document, an in-house statement of one Vatican department which should be taken together with all Vatican statements. When all are taken together it is clear that the Vatican is deeply committed to ecumenism. Archbishop Eames spoke of the deep disappointment *Dominus Iesus* had caused to Anglicans, especially since the very positive meeting of Roman Catholic and Anglican bishops in Mississauga, near Toronto, recently. Dr Morrow said the emphasis of *Dominus Iesus* on the uniqueness of Christ and the authority of Scripture in the face of modern relativism would be very welcome to Presbyterians. The document's view that Protestant bodies are not churches 'in the proper sense' does not disturb Presbyterians since they think the same about the Roman Catholic Church! Dr Taggart pointed out that nowadays no church statement can be confined to that church's members but will affect inter-church relations generally. He said the document did not reflect the ecumenical progress that had been made since Vatican II.

In a lively debate speakers from the floor regretted the effect the document would have on ecumenical relations in Ireland as it would give encouragement to anti-ecumenists. It was suggested that the four church leaders in Ireland should issue a joint statement on *Dominus Iesus* for Unity Week 2001.