

Rome Report

Fr George Kilcourse is writing a report on Rome which I expect will be out soon. I won't go into any specifics outside of that, however having been privileged to be part of the group that actually visited the PCPCU offices, I will share a few of my own reflections, especially of the things I learned.

I'd say we were very warmly received there, by several members of the staff including Fr Don Bolen, a Canadian who works on the Roman Catholic / Anglican dialogue. I think there was something of a tentative nature from both them and us at first, yet it quickly became clear that we had a common desire, namely to have the opportunities afforded in the 1993 Directory more widely known and applied.

There were two things that stood out for me as 'learning experiences'. One was to learn of the levels of authority regarding episcopal statements. One of our members asked why some documents appeared to be sent to Rome for approval, others did not. We were told that an individual bishop may want to have Rome look over a document, but that there was no need for that. The Bishop is the authority in his own diocese. On the other hand, statements and directories of episcopal conferences have to be sent to Rome if it's desired that they have binding effect over the bishops of the various dioceses within the conference. (If it's not intended that they have binding effect, but serve only as helps for individual bishops in their dioceses, the statements don't have to be sent to Rome for approval.) This is to ensure that the conference does not say/direct something which could bind the bishop 'inappropriately' (my word, not theirs). Of course, there's always the situation in which someone other than the bishop sends a statement off to Rome, usually by way of complaint. I'm not sure what authority Rome has in that regard, since the Bishop didn't request their input.

The other thing was the level of authority of Councils such as the PCPCU. One would think that, it being a significant RC body, it would have some authority to direct. It doesn't seem to. That is held to the Congregations. So, while the PCPCU may deeply desire that every Bishop, priest, and Ecumenical Officer read, be familiar with, and actually understand the 1993 Directory and what it says, it seems they have little authority to require even a reading of it. They seem to have to work pretty much by moral suasion (very much like senior/international levels of the Anglican church, now that I think of it), and hope and pray their work gets widely spread and read. I think in that regard, we may be of real help to them, in bringing the Directory to the attention of our local clergy, Ecumenical Officers, and Bishops. (Of course, it will in most cases still be the lived experience of interchurch families, and their relationships with their local priest, that will be key 'credibility-giver' in any education we may do, being seen otherwise, it seems, as the great uneducated masses, if I take some of the synodal reporting as a sample of the thinking.)

I came away with a sense that an ongoing conversation between us as a group and one or other member of the PCPCU would be welcomed. Clearly they don't need every one of us

writing to them! The next day, as we met in our own working group, we worked to set up some structures for the ongoing work that needs to be done. (Funny how you come away from one task, only to find you have another whole set of tasks on your plate as a result.)

We also were part of the papal audience, along with 20,000 others, but with seats up at the top, very near the Pope. Don Bolen had done a very good job of getting those tickets for us! It was good to see the Pope meeting and chatting what appeared to be so warmly with the various Bishops and dignitaries who came to see him – including one Anglican bishop. I wonder if he was perhaps an observer at the Synod? The look on Pope Benedict's face caused me to wonder if perhaps he was enjoying (in the best sense of that word) the task of being a pastor to the world instead of a watchdog. I got a sense that this was not a man who commanded the stage as his predecessor did, but simply went around meeting with the people.

Ray