

Five Views of ARCIC II

Dr Tim Bradshaw, Lecturer in Doctrine, Trinity College, Bristol, introduces the symposium by setting ARCIC II in its context.

The first ARCIC published its *Final Report* in 1982 and laid it on the tables of the Anglican Churches around the world and on that of the Vatican.¹ This *Final Report* consists of agreed statements on Eucharist, Ministry and Authority, with accompanying sets of elucidations responding to questions and criticisms received. The second such Commission was set up following the Pope's visit to Britain in order to consider the question of Justification. This new ARCIC has duly delivered an agreed statement entitled *Salvation and the Church*, and it is only now being scrutinised by churchmen.² In addition to the Anglican/Roman dialogue, the Anglican Church has also reached agreements with other denominations. The Pan Orthodox Church reached agreement with an Anglican Commission called *The Dublin Agreed Statement* in 1984, on the Church, the Trinity, Worship and Tradition.³ *God's Reign and our Unity* is an Anglican-Reformed agreed statement of the same year.⁴ There is also the WCC multilateral agreement, the Lima Document, on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982.⁵ These agreements have arisen in the wake of the ecumenical disaster of July, 1982, when the Covenant for Unity proposals collapsed as a result of the voting of the House of Clergy in General Synod.

The Church of England General Synod considered the *Final Report* in November 1986 and, voting by Houses, approved of it in each House (clergy, laity, bishops), thus clearing a necessary hurdle to the process of formal union with the Roman Catholic Church. The document on Salvation looks, to the educated ecclesiastical guesser like also gaining approval in the Anglican Church, though there are rumours of some heavyweight criticism of its reasoning. The ARCIC I *Final Report* on Authority, its argument for the Roman Primacy, did attract considerable criticism, notably in the House of Laity, and the hierarchs in the Church of England must have been given pause by the strength of feeling shown, although it was not quite enough to prevent a majority. This section of the *Final Report* was held only by General Synod to provide sufficient basis for further discussion, whereas the sub-reports relating to Eucharist and Ministry were adjudged to be actually consonant with the teaching of the Church of England. On these two

subjects therefore, there is now no longer an official reason why Rome and Canterbury should remain apart, as far as the Church of England is concerned.

It is important to note that each church in the Anglican Communion will vote on its own acceptance of the ARCIC proposals. The Church of Ireland General Synod, for example, was far more critical and thorough-going in its analysis of ARCIC I than was its English sister, but nevertheless still advocated that the ARCIC negotiation process should continue.

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The Roman response is hard to gauge. No formal statement equivalent to that of General Synod has been made. A frosty, Tridentine statement from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith severely criticised the *Final Report*.⁶ But Rome watchers caution us to be careful in jumping to any conclusions! It is ironical that the longevity of the present Pope may be a crucial factor in deciding Vatican sympathies: a new, more modern Pope may well change the present conservative ethos. This paradoxically sits uneasily with the whole rationale for primacy set out in the *Final Report*: a focus of unity is supposed to be consistent, and yet the ARCIC process requires a shift in emphasis, it seems, if its proposals are to be acceptable to Rome!

ARCIC II has set minds buzzing over its interesting new synthesis, and has once more used its recontextualizing methodology as a means for minimising the theological differences of the Reformation. Today we can all see that it was simply a misunderstanding, and that we all really meant much the same thing. But an interesting controversy

has arisen over the issue of indulgencies, which we now gather are still strongly affirmed by the Vatican and which were not even mentioned by the ARCIC II Report on *Salvation and the Church*. Is agreement being reached by ignoring points of genuine disagreement? Something which has not been included in the statement seems to be proving a main point of contention. Some formal statement will have to be made to clarify the official Roman Catholic position on indulgences. Once more the presence of a doctrinally conservative Pope, the model for the ARCIC focus of unity, adds a subtle twist to this particular plot.

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Onlookers may well want to ask about the response made to this whole ARCIC process by the Anglican evangelical constituency. This seems to be shifting. A few years ago the Anglican Evangelical Assembly welcomed the *Final Report* wholeheartedly and without reservation, but in January 1987 it passed a much more hesitant motion. This reflected a growing unease with ARCIC and its methodology, a feeling that something was wrong, although they couldn't quite define what. Modern Catholic thought, using Biblical categories subtly to reinterpret Catholic theology, has proved a googly which, it seems, Anglican evangelicals are unable to deal with. Despite this unease, evangelicals generally voted for the agreements in General Synod. The Church Society remains the main voice of dissent among Anglican evangelicals, not only to the Primacy Report, but also to those on Eucharist and Ministry, on the grounds that these reports also conflict with the Reformed base of Anglicanism as set out in the 39 Articles.

Where is the whole process leading? Strong supporters of the ARCIC process probably envisage the creation of a Uniate status for the Anglican Church with the Roman See. Some Orthodox Churches acknowledge Roman primacy and are accepted as slight oddities, but as in communion with Rome, retaining clergy privileges and rights of local

custom. Short of a total handing over of control to the Curia, this seems the most logical outcome, should the ARCIC process maintain its present strong momentum.

This process, formally speaking, continues alongside dialogue with other denominations, although the ARCIC head of steam far surpasses any other ecumenical process going on. This leaves the Church of England in the position of having two distinct ecumenical enterprises on hand. 'From above' we have the ARCIC dialogues and agreements, corresponding to little actual ecumenical common mission or worship at parish level. 'From below' we have many local ecumenical projects with Free Churches often generating enthusiastic common life, ministry and worship, but without strong encouragement at an official level. How will the ARCIC dynamo affect the latter form of ecumenism with sister churches not acknowledging a visible focus of unity in the Chair of Peter? This question does not seem to have been addressed. Indeed, as regards this ecumenism 'from below', it is only the fourth leg of the Lambeth Quadrilateral that prevents official unity overnight with co-operating churches, since doctrinal agreement already exists with them.⁷

In sum, the situation is complex. Will the ecclesiastical equivalent of Land Rover be absorbed into a giant multinational? Does the giant multinational think it worth the risk of incorporating this once profitable, rather genteel company beset with production problems and a lack of coherent company policy? Would a firmer style of management revitalise the old firm? For a discussion of some of the issues in the present state of market opinion, please read on.

Notes

1. *A Final Report*, Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission, SPCK/Catholic Truth Society, London, 1982.
 2. *Salvation and the Church*, 1986.
 3. *Anglican Orthodox Dialogue: the Dublin Agreed Statement*, SPCK, London, 1985.
 4. *God's Reign and our Unity*, SPCK/St Andrew Press, London/Edinburgh, 1984.
 5. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, (Faith and Order Paper No. III), WCC, Geneva, 1982.
 6. *Observations*, SCDF, Catholic Truth Society, 1982.
 7. The Lambeth Quadrilateral (1888) was the Anglican declaration of four essentials for a reunited Church: the Holy Scriptures, the Creeds, the two Sacraments, and the Historic Episcopate.
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