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GROWING TOGETHER

By David Phillips

After over 30 years of discussions and reports the formal dialogue of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was brought to an end. The ARCIC process followed a meeting between Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI in 1968. ARCIC itself was established in 1970 and in its first phase it produced three reports - Eucharistic Doctrine (1971), Ministry and Ordination (1973) and Authority in the Church I (1976) and II (1981). The first three reports were followed by elucidations and all were brought together in a so-called Final Report of 1982.

The second phase of ARCIC's work saw five reports; Salvation in the Church (1987), The Church as Communion (1991), Life in Christ (1994), The Gift of Authority (1999) and Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ (2005).

Church Society has consistently opposed these various reports as they all involve abandonment or twisting of the reformed doctrines of the Church of England. The General Synod has also generally been denied the opportunity to discuss them. But the Lambeth Conference of Bishops has approved the work of ARCIC. For example in 1988 the Lambeth Conference stated:

Recognises the Agreed Statements of ARCIC I on "Eucharistic Doctrine, Ministry and Ordination," and their Elucidations, as consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans and believes that this agreement offers a sufficient basis for taking the next step forward towards the reconciliation of our Churches grounded in agreement in faith. (1988-Resn 8.1)

Warmly welcomes the first Report of ARCIC II, "Salvation and the Church" (1987), as a timely and significant contribution to the understanding of the Churches' doctrine of salvation and commends this Agreed Statement about the heart of Christian faith to the provinces for study and reflection. (1988-Resn 8.5)

In some respects the resolutions of the 1998 conference were cooler but the Bishops did *welcome warmly the invitation of Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter Ut unum sint (1995) to consider the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome in the service of the unity of the Universal Church,* (1998 Resn 4.23.e)

For those in favour of the ecumenical enterprise there was a feeling that after 35 years ARCIC had made far less progress than they had hoped and desired. Whilst we may decry what had apparently been given away by Anglicans there remained differences which have appeared insurmountable. They mainly centre around the claims made for itself by the papacy and some of the statements propagated on the basis of the false claims. In the first phase of ARCIC's work the papacy kept criticising the reports so that since then they have usually been reworked before release to make them acceptable to Rome.

As a consequence progress has been slow and the ecumaniacs wanted a fresh approach focusing not on the theological divisions, but one shared mission and ministry at the local level. The upshot of this was a meeting of Bishops at Mississauga in Canada in 2000 (notice Bishops, not theologians as was the case with ARCIC). Following this meeting the International Anglican - Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) was established. The Roman Catholic involvement appeared to cool following the appointment of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New

Hampshire and following the first steps towards women Bishops in the Church of England. Despite this however IARCCUM did begin its work with reflections being issued in June 2004 and a communique in December 2005.

The first official IARCCUM report, *Growing Together*, has now appeared. It appears that the report was leaked and Ruth Gledhill reported in *The Times* that Anglicans were preparing to accept the primacy of the pope. This is a typical piece of over-reporting since even amongst liberals there are still major problems with the papacy but the report does make grim reading. As a result of the news stories the full report has been released.

The goal of the enterprise is reiterated as the 'restoration of visible unity and full ecclesial communion'. This is a laudable goal, but it cannot stand on its own. The only way we could have such union and communion is on the basis of the mutual acceptance of the full authority of Holy Scripture and that the Church cannot ordain things contrary to Scripture (Article 20). Thus to achieve true unity Rome would have to abandon its errors and pretensions.

Reviewing the past

The first part of the report is an attempt to summarise the agreements reached over the years of dialogue. There is not much that is new but the way in which it is put together highlights just how bad the reports have been. On point after point the reformation is sold out and the description of Anglican belief set out is unrecognisable to anyone who holds to the historic formularies of our Church.

Some examples:

Para 19: Roman Catholics and Anglicans agree that the Eucharist is the effectual sign of koinonia, that the ministry of oversight (episcopate) serves the koinonia, and that a ministry of primacy is a visible link and focus of koinonia. (n.b. koinonia = fellowship)

If this doesn't make sense to you on a first reading you are not alone. It is typical of the way the ecumenical process uses language. It is an argument for a universal primacy. But it is recognised that there are problems. So paragraph 23 says:

While already we can affirm together that universal primacy, as a visible focus of unity, is "a gift to be shared", able to be "offered and received even before our Churches are in full communion", nevertheless serious questions remain for Anglicans regarding the nature and jurisdictional consequences of universal primacy.

Likewise, on the question of nature of the elements in the Lord's Supper we are told in paragraph 41:

Before the Eucharistic Prayer, to the question: 'What is that?', the believer answers: 'It is bread'. After the Eucharistic Prayer, to the same question he answers: 'It is truly the body of Christ, the Bread of Life'."

Whilst on Mary it is said in paragraph 89:

We learn that Mary was prepared by divine grace to be the mother of our Redeemer in accord with the biblical pattern of grace and hope. In view of this vocation to be the mother of the Holy One, it is fitting that Christ's redeeming work reached 'back' in Mary to the depths of her being and to her earliest beginnings.

Again, you may wonder what this is referring to. It is a reference to the immaculate conception, the Roman dogma (which all are required to accept) that Mary herself was conceived without sin.

Thus, if you want a good summary of the horrors of ARCIC and all the nonsense that it declared over the years this new report is quite useful.

Growing together

From paragraph 100 onwards the IARCCUM Bishops make various suggestions as to how Anglicans and Roman Catholics might work together at a more local level in ministry and mission.

Some of the suggestions made:

- Joint baptism preparation (#100)
- Attendance at each other's Eucharist (but not participation) (#101)
- Other services and acts of witness together (#102)
- Praying for each others' bishops - Anglicans should pray for the pope (#103)
- Joint study (#104-107)
- Co-operation between Bishops (#108-116)
- Joint training for lay ministries (#117)
- Shared outreach and mission (#118-125)

It should be recognised that many of these things are already happening at a local level. Likewise on some national issues, for example in response to the Sexual Orientation Regulations, there has been co-operation. Therefore, most of these things are not new. What is new is the attempt to formally encourage them as part of a process for reunion despite some fundamental differences.

Amongst the other suggestions we also find:

We urge Anglicans and Roman Catholics to explore together how the ministry of the Bishop of Rome might be offered and received in order to assist our Communion to grow towards full, ecclesial communion. (Para 114)

Response

Within its own terms the new IARCCUM report seems all very reasonable. If you believe that the old problems, the issues that divided the Church at the Reformation and for which our forebears were martyred, have all been sorted out then the IARCCUM approach makes sense. Rather than wait for the theologians to dot the i's and cross the t's just get on and do things together.

But if you believe, as Church Society does, that the issues at the Reformation remain and that the ARCIC process has only gone forward by forsaking genuine Anglicanism then this latest report is full of absurd suggestions.

Clearly on some matters, such as issues of shared social concern, it makes sense to co-operate against secularism and liberalism. But how can a genuine Anglican take part in a Roman Catholic Mass when we believe it so distorts the truth about Christ? How can we co-operate in mission when we have a different gospel message? How can we even pray together if Rome encourages us to pray to the saints and to Mary and believe this to be error and deception?

What are we to really make of the Pope? We can certainly pray for the pope, but we do so remembering that the claims of the papacy set it in conflict with Christ because the papacy claims authority and titles which belong to Christ alone. Therefore we will pray that the pope will repent and turn to Christ.

And why should we think about the universal primacy of Rome. Certainly if the Church of Rome abandoned all its pretensions and repudiated papal infallibility and all the false claims about the authority of the Roman See then it might be possible to imagine a future in which we recognised the legitimacy of the Bishop of Rome, but why his primacy? When you strip away all the false claims the only basis for primacy is historical, and if it is historical it is not better than the claims of the Bishop of Jerusalem or Istanbul. Indeed any Bishop could fulfill the task just as well. Therefore the call to recognise primacy is a call to accept all the errors of Rome.

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