

● From "The Modern Churchman" Anthony Dyson

ARCIC and the Papacy

An Examination of the Documents on Authority

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"In the ecumenical atmosphere of today it is the duty of Anglicans to think seriously and unpolemically about their attitude to the Papacy".¹ It is precisely this task to which the completed ARCIC report, and especially the final document on Authority, summons the Anglican communion.² Yet without doubt the Anglican members of the commission have greatly underestimated the extent to which their proposals about a universal primacy exercised by a Bishop of Rome involve for Anglicans (and conceivably also for Roman Catholics) new ways of thinking about their churches. The argument of this paper will be that, while Anglicans ought broadly to welcome the documents as "consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans",³ there remains a considerable problem with the implication of such agreement and thus with any further stage of implementation.

In what follows I propose to concentrate on the theological issues raised by the way in which authority is handled, especially in the last two documents Authority I (AI) and II (AII). The documents are, of course, brief, but are, because of their composite authorship, extraordinarily difficult to grasp. Any attempt to understand what they are saying inevitably involves a measure of interpretation, and a relative weighing of one emphasis over against another. Hitherto the reception of ARCIC statements, though on the whole friendly, has been somewhat bemused by their tone. Frankly, they are unappetising fare, their subtlety and care being concealed under bland phraseology. It is my intention to add a certain astringency to the discussion by attempting both to understand their intention at some depth, and also to subject them to criticism.

But, first, a word needs to be said about the context of the modern Church of England which is charged with the responsibility of receiving them. If one compares the present situation with the pre-Oxford movement Church of England, it is patent that within the last 150 years there has taken place the most profound process of de-confessionalization to fall upon any European denomination. Whereas in 1832, at the inception of the University of Durham, which offered to Anglican ordinands the first formally taught and examined course in theology in the country, the basis

¹Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report*. London: CTS/SPCK, 1982. £1.95.

of the curriculum was the Prayer Book and Articles,³ in the Church of England of the 1980's the Articles have been decisively demoted and the Book of Common Prayer has an alternative, if not a rival. There is, above all, a quite new declaration and oath of assent, hospitable of a wider variety of theological opinion than any previous clerical oath. This 150-year process is rightly called de-confessionalization. This is a European phenomenon, and it has parallels in the other European Christian denominations. But even the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe have retained a stronger hold upon their sources of confessional identity than has the Church of England.

This process has led, I judge, to a profound crisis of identity, some of the turmoils of which I have analysed elsewhere.⁴ Contemporary evidence of this crisis is the extraordinary volatility of Anglican opinion. It is astonishing to recall that a few years ago the Church of England received a document entitled, *Christian Believing*, in which the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds were permitted, after some hesitation, to remain in the life-blood of the Church. All churches are, by definition, confessing bodies; and Anglicanism seems to be in a strange twilight zone between a confessing past and a future of some unspecified kind. This context poses the question, Does not the whole of the ARCIC movement represent a re-confessionalization of Anglicanism? Anglican ordinands, who scarcely give a passing thought to the Thirty Nine Articles in their training for the ministry, are apparently invited by ARCIC to attend to the precise meaning of passages from the decrees of Vatican I and II. But is this actually conceivable? Is it proposed that Anglicans should from now on accustom themselves to the small print in which the creeds, definitions and declarations of the Roman Catholic Church are expounded? In particular, if the Anglican Communion were to accept ARCIC's argument for a universal primacy, would the nature of that primacy be expounded in the particular definitions and declarations of the Roman Catholic Church of the past? A positive answer to this question would have the most dramatic impact upon the Anglican Communion. It could only mean that Anglicanism was proposing irrevocably to reverse the process of deconfessionalization. This, I believe, is the context in which these documents are to be discussed; and to this question we must return at the end.

The enquiry of this paper is now to focus on four particular issues in the ARCIC documents on each of which there is an important residual ambiguity.

Anglican theological traditions. In an important passage AII states that Anglicans are entitled to believe that, under a universal primate, there would be no suppression of "theological, liturgical and other traditions which they value" (AII, 22). The assurances that ARCIC is able to give extend to the collegial association the universal primate has with his brother bishops (AII, 19), to the service character of primacy (AII, 19), to the moral limits of the exercise of primacy (AII, 20), and to the furtherance of genuine catholicity (AII, 21). Nonetheless it is clearly stated that "the universal primate, in collegial association with his fellow bishops, has the

task of safeguarding the faith and unity of the universal church" and "the diocesan bishop is subject to his authority" (AII, 21). In other words, despite the assurances, a Pope could instruct a diocesan bishop on the implications of "safeguarding the faith", and expect to be obeyed. He would not do so autocratically, without "association" (whatever that might mean in practice), but he plainly has the right to do so in virtue of the definition of his office.

What, therefore, any universal primate would think to be "the faith" is bound, therefore, to be crucial to Anglicans, if their bishops became subject to the Pope's legitimate authority. Here it is the probable future practice of any Pope which is the question at issue, and ARCIC believes it has an answer. It cites from Pope Paul VI the following statement:

There will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church—this humble "Servant of the servants of God"—is able to embrace her ever beloved Sister in one authentic communion of the family of Christ.

Does this statement meet the case? ARCIC is plainly convinced that it does, that is, that the recollection of these words together with the kind of portrait of papal behaviour outlined above, constitute a sufficient assurance for Anglicans.

However, the Anglican case is clearly stated by ARCIC itself not in terms of prestige or piety or usage, but of theological traditions. Anglican theological traditions are contained in the Articles, the Homilies, the Book of Common Prayer, and the resolutions of successive Lambeth Conferences to the present, to name but some of the sources. Is it clear that no Pope would be in any way inclined to suppress such traditions as contrary to "the faith"? Moreover the determining factor is not what a Pope might consider to be a legitimate theological tradition, but rather what Anglicans would so consider ("theological, liturgical and other traditions which *they* value"—my emphasis). We have here, in other words, an interesting potential area of future conflict. The Anglican concern is made entirely clear. One's cause for doubt is whether the members of ARCIC have actually taken stock of the full rigour of the requirement. The alleged assurances are by no means adequate to the case.

Both churches have traditions, and the trouble with traditions is precisely that they are preserved, and may be rediscovered. Although the main agenda of ARCIC seems to have consisted of problems in Roman Catholic tradition, it would be somewhat unequal to suppose that Anglicans alone are being invited to de-traditionalize themselves. According to AII, 23, however, this is not to be the case. The traditions (and freedoms) which Anglicans value are not to be surrendered. The major problem is for Rome to decide whether such freedom, against the exercise of which it has so strenuously campaigned in recent episodes, is now to be regarded as inherent in the very catholicity of the Church.

Reception. Reception is plainly related to the above problem, since most post-Reformation and many pre-Reformation decisions and declarations from Rome have been either rejected or ignored in the Anglican communion. The ARCIC documents are careful, therefore, both to restrict the area of authoritative definition and to incorporate an element of assessment by the whole community.

The subject is first raised in AI 6, where it is firmly stated that "perception of God's will for his Church does not belong only to the ordained ministry but is shared by all its members". Although it belongs to the office of an ordained minister to give authoritative expression to the gospel and its implication, nonetheless "the community, for its part, must respond to and assess the insights and teaching of the ordained ministers". (AI, 6).

Similarly at regional or universal level decisions of councils are to be received as authoritative, "when they express the common faith and mind of the Church" (AI, 9). One of the criteria for recognizing local decisions is "the response of the faithful" (AI 16); another is confirmation by the principal sees, especially of Rome. The matter is dealt with further in the Elucidations to AI. Reception is not, says ARCIC, to be thought of as creating truth; nor on the other hand is this merely the legitimization of a conciliar decision. The Commission seeks for a *via media* between democratization and authoritarianism. Reception is, in fact, the final stage of a continuous process of discernment and response involving the whole people of God.

Reception is undoubtedly an area of exceptional difficulty, and the concept of a *sensus fidelium* is fraught with ambiguity. First of all, it must be acknowledged that human beings in authority are inherently prone to believe that they govern by consent; evidence to the contrary is ignored or suppressed by a number of psychological or structural devices. How can this natural temptation be avoided? One important means, I believe, is to admit critics into the decision-making procedures of the Church, and to defend them against marginalization. Leadership in the Church also needs to expose itself to an accurate flow of information from lay people in local communities.⁹ Neither critics nor lay opinion are invariably right; but if the critics have been silenced and the channels to the top have been carefully filtered so that leaders only hear what is known to please them, then talk of a *sensus fidelium* is pious fraud.

There are two obvious problems for Anglicans in the role of a universal primate as currently conceived by Roman Catholics. The first is that critics are marginalized by being removed from positions of influence, especially in the Universities. One of the first acts of Pope John Paul II was to issue an Apostolic Constitution on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (*Sapientia Christiana*, 15 April, 1979). This document, which strongly emphasises the adherence of Faculties of Theology "to the full doctrine of Christ, whose authentic guardian and interpreter has always been through the ages the Magisterium of the Church" (Forward IV), is the basis on

which action was taken against Roman Catholic professors of dogmatics and moral theology, alleged to be teaching contrary to the Magisterium. The well-known cases of disciplinary proceedings are of much less importance than the impact upon a host of lesser men who have been frightened into caution by the prospect of official disfavour.

The second problem is not unrelated, since it is often alleged by Roman Catholics, sensitive to the problematic character of this disciplinary activity, that it derives not from the Pope himself, but from the Congregation for the Faith. The Pope, it is said, is badly advised, or at least subject to conflicting advice from rival factions in the bureaucracy. What Anglicans must understand is that in accepting the argument for a universal primate, even an ideal one, they are necessarily accepting the existence and the influence of a central bureaucracy. There is no way in which oversight over the whole church can be exercised, on the necessary scale, apart from some organs for collecting and sifting information, for studying and to a large extent preparing decisions. To all of this there is a very unromantic aspect, in the toils of which ARCIC itself on more than one occasion has become involved.

Both of these questions, that of the marginalization of critics, and the problem of the bureaucratic control of the Church, are matters of actual practice of great importance to the reality or unreality of the assertions about reception. Anglicans have become accustomed to open government, the public discussion of controversial questions, before, during and after "decisions" made by competent authority. Rome tends to insist that a subject may become closed, once a matter has been decided by the Magisterium. As Vatican II put it:

In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul. This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*.⁸

Roman Catholic commentators point out that "a religious assent of soul" is not the same thing as faith; and moreover that there are various degrees to be observed, according to the precise emphasis given by the bishops or the Pope to a particular point.⁹ But again one must observe the practical consequences of such an assertion, even when modified. Not merely does it create an unfavourable climate in which to attend to serious criticism, it appears to necessitate an immense apparatus of self-justificatory commentary when decisions of the past are being set on one side. Such apologia are wearisome, and occasionally blatantly dishonest; they seem to put a premium on theologians of extreme legalistic subtlety capable of wresting modern sounding meanings from documents of a past age; or alternatively those able to deploy fashionable hermeneutical gambits at once to justify and to relativize decisions of the past.

Anglicans, by contrast, hold an ecclesiology which enables them to admit that, in the past, they may have made mistakes. An example of this, important for Anglican-Roman Catholic relations, is the Anglican revision of attitude toward the control of conception by artificial means embodied in the 1958 Lambeth Report on *The Family in Contemporary Society*. By the criterion of reception, it is the argument of this report, rather than that of the long and strongly expressed Roman tradition of opposition to birth control, which has commended itself to the Christian conscience. A more central doctrinal question obviously concerns the validity of Anglican orders. If Anglicans are to be told after receiving the ARCIC reports, that *Apostolicae Curae* was, after all, fully justified in its historic time and place, then, of course, the Anglican non-reception of this document becomes irrelevant. The casualty, in this case, is not merely the Edwardine ordinal and the impressive historical counter-arguments of the Anglican Archbishops, but the very notion of reception itself. The blandness of the ARCIC references to reception ought to lead, I believe, to a more urgent and clarifying grasp among Anglicans on the importance of reception to its understanding of authority in the Church.

The "Ideal and the Actual". The Commission's method, especially in dealing with the question of papal primacy, was to lay emphasis on the distinction between the ideal and the actual (preface to the final Report, citing AI Preface). The point of the distinction was evidently to enable the Anglicans on the Commission to agree that "in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see [i.e. Rome]" (AI, 23). In particular this primacy as described entails a pattern of complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episcopé* serving the *koinonia* of the churches (AI, 23). This statement is further amplified, if anything in a more Anglican direction, by the affirmation in AII

that the Church needs both a multiple, dispersed authority, with which all God's people are actively involved, and also a universal primate as servant and focus of visible unity in truth and love. (AII, 33.)

This method of delineating an ideal is important because it enables the Anglican side of the Commission to enter reservations against the practice of primacy in the past, without at the same time necessitating any endorsement of these reservations by Roman Catholics. The criticisms are quite severe. In AI it is explicitly recognized that sometimes functions irrelevant to primacy have been assumed by the see of Rome; sometimes the behaviour of the Pope has been deplorable; sometimes wrong interpretations of his office have been given; sometimes it has been subject to external pressures (AI, 12). In AII further reservations are made. It is recognised that there have been faulty or unwarrantedly dogmatic interpretations of the Petrine texts and *ius divinum*; the enunciated principles of jurisdiction contain provisions which patently entail admission of past transgressions; the importance of the Marian dogmas are said to have been exaggerated and it is noted that many Anglicans will have reservations about the way in

which they were promulgated; and most strikingly of all ARCIC recognise that "the ascription to the bishop of Rome of infallibility under certain conditions has tended to lend exaggerated importance to all his statements" (AII, 32).

Anglicans will find this criticism both reassuring and disarming, and it constitutes the backcloth for the ingenious solution to the question of Church order, namely an *ideal* situation in which both an (Anglican?) view of dispersed authority and a (Roman?) view of universal primacy are clamped together as complementary.

But can this transition be accomplished so neatly? How does agreement about an ideal help, if there is residual dissatisfaction about the actual? Is not the critical question for Anglicans whether or not the practice of papacy is consistent with the alleged ideal?

A deeper question is also at stake, namely whether "authority" as a theological topic ought to be separated from a social analysis of power and its exercise. Authority-talk tends to be the form in which power is legitimated; it also runs the very grave danger of being the way in which the reality of power is disguised. The presentation of an ideal authority needs to be counter-balanced by an entirely frank exposition of where in practice the power lies, and how it is exercised. This is not a separate task, or subsequent stage, once "agreement in essentials" has been reached. "Agreement in essentials" would be badly grounded if "the essentials" were to include a chimera.

Professors Anthony and Richard Hanson have recently stated:

- If a future Pope were to approach the Anglican communion, wholly disavowing any desire to exercise jurisdiction over them, but asking them to recognise him as honorary Primate of the Western Church, wielding moral, not legal, authority and leadership, and showing himself ready to consult them instead of condemning or excommunicating them, they would find it hard to reject such an offer.⁸

Now it is plain that ARCIC propose something much more advanced than an Honorary Primacy of the Western Church. But by wrapping up the whole proposal in talk of a distinction between ideal and actual, ARCIC has befogged the issue. The plain questions need to be pressed. Is ARCIC speaking of a *reformed* papacy? And ought not Anglicans to wait until the papacy is reformed before agreeing to an "ideal" whose status is either controversial or unclear?

Episcopacy. If one examines the crucial sections of Chapter II of the Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, one discovers the assertion that:

- just as the role that the Lord gave individually to Peter, the first among the apostles, is permanent and meant to be transmitted to his successors, so also the apostles' office of nurturing the Church is permanent, and was meant to be exercised by the sacred order of bishops (article 20).

In other words episcopacy is based on the same divinely-given ordinance as primacy. This view will be somewhat strange for Anglicans who are accustomed to thinking that episcopacy is a much more certain matter than papal primacy. The Preface to the 1662 Ordinal, after all, states that the threefold office of ministry has been in existence "from the Apostles' time", and says nothing at all about Petrine primacy.

The ARCIC discussion of the primacy texts is robust, critical and forthright; and many will be surprised at the minimal interpretation which merely ventures to suggest that "it is possible to think that a primacy of the Bishop of Rome is not contrary to the New Testament and is part of God's purpose regarding the Church's unity and catholicity, while admitting the New Testament texts offer no sufficient basis for this" (AII, 7). Nonetheless it ought to be noted that primacy and episcopacy are part of the *same* argument in ARCIC as in Vatican II, and the significance of this for the future of Anglicanism deserves careful study and commentary.

The first point to be observed concerns precisely the Biblical basis of Anglican belief. Article VI of the Thirty Nine Articles makes clear that Christians may not be required to believe what cannot be read in, or proved by Holy Scripture. This negative condition does not entail the fundamentalist thesis that whatever is read in, or "proved" by Holy Scripture has to be believed. The article is, on the contrary, a form of protection against ecclesiastical authoritarianism, the binding of a believer's conscience to the edicts of councils and church authorities, apart from their open biblical basis. As applied to episcopacy (and, *a fortiori*, to primacy) the consequence of this position is that once the claim that episcopacy is to be read in and proved by Holy Scripture is dropped, then Anglicans cannot be required to hold episcopacy as an article of faith.

Now it has been realised for a long time that the modern study of the New Testament has undermined the idealised pictures of "succession", which portrays the apostles as handing on their role and status to the episcopate. This is recognised by the ARCIC statement on Ministry (para. 6), which admits the probability in the very early church of "considerable diversity in the structure of pastoral ministry". However, the statement continues, the threefold ministry is established about the same time as the canon of the New Testament—the implication being that if one accepts the canon, one ought to accept the threefold ministry! And the argument in favour of accepting a universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome is no less strong.

The dilemma, for Anglicans, is this. How can they use the criterion of scripture against episcopacy (and primacy), when the presupposition behind the scriptural principle (i.e. canonicity) is of no greater antiquity than episcopacy (and primacy)? If the argument for the canon is historical and developmental, so is the argument for episcopacy (and primacy). This is an entirely reasonable contention, and Anglicans will now be forced to take the matter more seriously than hitherto.

The lines of the reply, however, are not far to seek. The basis of, and reason for the appeal to scripture lies not in the mere existence of a determinate canon, a list of books authorized by competent authority, but in the nature of the gospel itself. The criterion of canonicity was agreement in the gospel. It was because Matthew agreed with Paul, and Paul with John, and so forth, that their writings as a whole bore witness to the apostolic agreement in the one gospel. Doubtless the early fathers over-emphasised the degree of unanimity. But when comparison is made with the content of the non-canonical writings it becomes difficult to hold that they were seriously mistaken. The unity of the church lies in agreement in the oneness of the apostolic faith.

What then of the episcopate? This is the subsidiary principle which breaks the potential circularity of an appeal to an authentic gospel in authentic writings. It is this faith, so the united episcopate testifies, which has, as a matter of fact, been taught everywhere by those whom the apostles themselves commissioned. "Apostolic succession" cannot be an independent principle guaranteeing continuity, since the definition of "apostolic" is by reference to the gospel. Because of human frailty it would always be possible for a person in linear succession to desert the gospel.

The difficult question which ARCIC do not wholly face, is whether it is possible for a church, containing an "apostolic" ministry and primacy in succession, so to depart from the gospel that separation from it is required by fidelity to the gospel. It is this that the Reformers obviously thought possible, or at least that adhesion to the Petrine throne no longer guaranteed participation in the apostles' fellowship. For obvious reasons ARCIC do not seek to comment on the justification or otherwise for the Reformers' actions, and consequently it remains unclear what precisely episcopacy and primacy actually achieve or effect in the church. But it is not possible for Anglicans to say that communion with the see of Rome *ensures* unity, without condemning their whole history. Moreover it is insufficiently appreciated that neither are they able to assert that the episcopate ensures unity, without also providing some explanation of the fact that "the episcopate" is today ruinously divided. In the past Anglicans maintained some kind of coherence by denying that Rome had any right to organize an episcopate inside Anglican territory. By the very growth of ecumenical toleration the Anglican understanding of the episcopate has become extraordinarily puzzling. ARCIC achieve an undoubted diplomatic coup, but one which leaves the whole matter of Anglican responsibility towards the so-called non-episcopal churches in a most unsatisfactory state.

5. *Conclusion.* Each of these inquiries have revealed a residual unclarity in the ARCIC position. Anglican theological traditions are said to be secure, but a loophole is given for their wholesale suppression. Reception is said to be integral to the authority of decisions, but the past Anglican criticisms of Roman documentation is ignored. It remains unclear whether an ideal

papacy is the same as a reformed papacy. And, most markedly of all, the agreement on episcopacy seems to undermine one important element in Anglican ecumenical endeavour.

The lack of clarity on these individual points might, perhaps, be compensated by a strong general drift of the documents as a whole. But here the Janus-like aspect persists. On the one hand, their treatment of the themes is rational and critical. Wherever Roman Catholic texts are interpreted, they are interpreted in the most Anglican sense conceivable. On the other hand, many Anglicans will be very astonished to discover that *these* texts and documents have become so formative in the consideration of subjects like Authority and Ministry. This is where the question of the continuation of Anglican theological traditions is absolutely crucial. Every church has its preferred methods of construing the gospel. Anglicans used to do so largely with reference to a selection of Patristic texts and to their sixteenth and seventeenth century liturgies and documents. But after its revulsion from the reformation, and its recently critical treatment of the patristic period (for example, by Wiles and Lampe), the question becomes urgent, in what tradition does Anglicanism now stand? This is where the ARCIC initiative ought to lead to a helpful clarification. If Anglicans are ready to state that the ARCIC position is "consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans", will this be an act of all embracing Anglican comprehensiveness, or will it be an act of re-confessionalization? To put the matter another way, would Anglicans be saying no more than that ARCIC interpretations of Roman Catholic documents are *one* legitimate way of construing the faith? Or would they be saying that there is a strong presumption in favour of the normativeness of the Roman confessional documentation? If the latter is the case, then two Anglican theological traditions deriving respectively from the reformation and from the enlightenment, and both with their roots in Scripture, are in some doubt. And the difficulty is that ARCIC do not indicate unequivocally which of the two possibilities is the case.

Footnotes

1. A. T. and R. P. C. Hanson, *Reasonable Belief*. Oxford, 1980, p. 262.
2. The Anglican Consultative Council 5, meeting at Newcastle in September 1981, agreed that this question ought to be put to the churches of the Anglican Communion.
3. Based on recent research at Durham on the lectures of the first Professor of Divinity, Canon Henry Jenkyns.
4. *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, London, 1978.
5. See N. Lash, *Voices of Authority*. London, 1976, p. 93.
6. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, paragraph 25.
7. See A. Grillmeier, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. I, London, 1967, pp. 209ff.
8. *Reasonable Belief*, p. 262.

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