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REMARKS ON THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH'S "OBSERVATIONS ON THE FINAL REPORT OF ARCIC"

By

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Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada

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(Final Version)

As our contribution to the ongoing discussion mandated by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (SCDF), the Roman Catholic members of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada would like to offer some remarks on the document of the SCDF entitled Observations on the Final Report of ARCIC (hereafter Observations), in which it offers a preliminary evaluation of the work of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) in its Final Report(FR)

General Comments:

We are most grateful for the Observations emanating from within the SCDF. These Observations have been transmitted as a contribution of the SCDF to further dialogue within the Roman Catholic Church, a dialogue involving especially its Episcopal Conferences, on the matters raised by the Final Report. This call for further dialogue implies that the Observations are intended not as a final judgement but precisely as observations offered at the beginning of a further process of assessment within the Church. We are appreciative that these Observations were prepared with great dispatch, in order to avoid undue delay in this important matter.

While Christ's call for unity is an urgent one, unity must be built on a strong foundation. In a first moment within this process of assessment, it is understandable that the Observations single out what appear to be difficulties and ambiguities within the Final Report, as befits the mandate of the SCDF. Our own contribution is situated within a second moment, that of squarely facing the difficulties and ambiguities raised by the SCDF, of guarding the text of the Final Report against misunderstandings and misinterpretations, no matter how unintentional, and of setting forth the context within which the Final Report offers its conclusions. In a subsequent moment of this process, we hope that the Episcopal Conferences of the Roman Catholic Church, especially those which already have a long-standing familiarity with the Anglican Communion, will reach a balanced assesssment, true to the deposit of the faith and based on a proper understanding of the Final Report.

As Roman Catholic members of the Canadian ARC dialogue, we are heartened by the overall positive evaluation given at the beginning of the Observations. No matter what difficulties the authors of the Observations have encountered, they still acknowledge the quality of the doctrinal rapprochement achieved, based upon renunciation of a "sterile polemical mentality" and upon entry into a "patient and exacting dialogue". (A/1).

The Observations include "theological opinion" among secondary points on which divergence is possible within unity (A/2 ii). We consider that as a whole the Observations are expressive of a certain current of theological opinion within the Roman Catholic Church, one which prizes literal adherence to precise formulations, above all those of Vatican I and Trent, whereas the The Final Report is expressive of just as legitimate currents of theological opinion within the Roman Catholic Church. It tries to overcome historical differences in

formulations between Catholics and Anglicans, and to arrive at the reality of the faith to which the formulations point. It assesses the weight and import of earlier biblical and traditional formulations, and seeks to restate certain dogmatic formulae in modern terms. This is not only allowed but also becomes necessary if the commandment of Christ is to be taken seriously.

How do we know that the ARCIC formulations point to the same realities of faith as the more traditional ones insisted upon by the authors of Observations? On the surface, the safer approach is to demand adherence to such tried and tested formulae. If Anglicans assent to them, then we are sure, on this view, of having substantial agreement. Such outward adherence to the letter is meaningful and real only to the extent that it points to an inward agreement of mind and heart. Any two persons are able to understand the same formula in quite a different way. Thus the members of ARCIC have opted for attentiveness to the spirit, for the "patient and exacting dialogue" rightly praised by the Observations, and this has resulted in newer formulations on the basis of which considerable areas of substantial agreement between our traditions are claimed. How can we know that this substantial meeting of minds and hearts claimed by ARCIC is valid and in conformity to the traditions of both our Churches? For the last fifteen years of ecumenical dialogue we have gone through a painstaking process of questioning in which we have clarified, interpreted, tested out, and reexpressed our beliefs in new ways. These fifteen years have enabled us to grow together in a shared perception of the truth which we consider to be much more solid and significant than any hasty bureaucratic act of putting one's signature to a formula imposed unilaterally. The same quality of dialogue on a much broader basis within our Churches will be needed if this shared perception of the truth is to yield the fruits of unity so ardently desired by Christ our Lord.

The method used by ARCIC has at times led to new fomulae, and, as we have said above, the initial reaction of the SCDF was drafted with despatch. Thus it is not surprising, given the conciseness and the sometimes new language of the Final Report, that the Observations show misunderstanding of many statements in the Final Report, taking some isolated sentences which are formulated in a new language without listening to the arguments which led to these new formulations or placing them within their context.

In the course of our point by point commentary on the Observations we hope to bring to light some of the differences in theological perspective that we see between The Final Report and the Observations, perspective quite legitimate in the light of Vatican II and other recent documents, and clear up misunderstandings of the Final Report.

Detailed Comments

A/2 1: Statements Left in Historical Sequence

The Observations remark that the Final Report lacks harmony and

homogeneity because the "elucidations" have not been incorporated into the original statement. At some point it might be good to incorporate clarifications and elucidations into a single document which presents the mature understanding reached by our dialogue. But there is also a significant advantage in presenting the fruit of ARCIC's labour as it came out of the historical process of the dialogue, since the hoped for outcome of the Final Report is further and wider dialogue and a deeper sharing in the faith. That there was a long process of growing together, that hard questions were asked and answered, that issues were dealt with in a gradually deeper way over the years of the dialogue is not something of which ARCIC is ashamed, to be covered over in the homegeneity of a single text, but rather an exemplification of how, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Christians can grow together in the ability to discern each other's faith and express what makes them one. In the history of the Church, authoritative doctrinal pronouncements have often served as timely stimuli in the direction of greater unity, but behind them there was a long and often tortuous process of development, and ahead of them there was a further process of development, elucidation, interpretation, which often led to further authoritative pronouncements. The level of clarity and the iron-clad guarantees longed for in the Observations appear to be more appropriate to what the Lord will achieve for us in patria than to what we can expect of each other as we struggle in via to live out the mystery of a faith that for all the light it casts remains obscure. "Now through a glass darkly" characterizes not only our life as Christians in separate communions, but also our quest for unity.

While the main documents of the Final Report are not consolidated in an attempt to reach an a-temporal perspective, still we would point out that the Introduction to the Final Report (FR pp. 5 - 8) reflects on the entire chronological range of texts presented in the report, and finds in them an overarching unity based on the theme of koinonia, which was very significant in Vatican II. This Introduction can certainly bear further development, but it does show that we are not dealing with a collection of documents lacking harmony and homogeneity and prone to a variety of conflicting interpretations, but with a report which, in spite of its genetic order, is marked by real unity of vision.

A/2 ii: The Meaning of "Substantial Agreement"

While there may be ambiguities in the meaning of "substantial" as used in English and in languages of Latin origin, the authors of the Final Report were very careful to define what they meant by the term "substantial agreement". Substantial agreement means "unanimous agreement of the members of ARCIC on essential matters where it consider that doctrine admits no divergence" (FR 17), on questions where "agreement is indispensible for unity" (FR 39). Substantial agreement can coexist with divergences in matters of practise and the theological judgements relating to those matters of practise. In the documents on the Eucharist and on Ministry, substantial agreement is claimed by ARCIC, and continuing divergences in those areas are claimed to pertain to matters of practise and judgements concerning them. (FR 24) Authority I

outlines the four matters which prevented ARCIC from claiming substantial agreement on authority in the Church. (FR 64-65) Authority II does not state that substantial agreement has been fully achieved in those four matters, (agreement in facto esse) but in a very nuanced way shows that substantial agreement is at hand (agreement in fieri). According to the Final Report, this degree of convergence is not such that the two Churches are deemed ready for immediate corporate reunion, but is held to be sufficient to warrant early steps to bring the two churches more visibly into the one koinonia, making possible the full achievement of what is already at hand. (FR 97 - 100)

A/2 iii: The Possibility of Ambiguity in Interpretation

The Observations claim that certain formulations of the Report are insufficiently explicit and fear that they might be read in contrasting and ultimately incompatible ways, which would preclude their use for reconciliation of the Churches. Is there in ultimate analysis any formulation which guarantees that those who outwardly subscribe to it are inwardly one in mind and heart? Apart from the possibility of dissembling, there is the fact that people, even with the greatest good will, come to a common text with different perspectives, approaches, existential concerns. In ecumenical dialogue, we strive for the maximum achievement of clearly articulated consensu, but that consensus will never replace the crucial step in which, after lengthy investigation and deep familiarity with each other, the partners are able to tell one another "When you affirm that you recognize your own deeply held position in the same formula in which I recognize my own, I believe you, and I am ready to join in witnessing to the union of minds and hearts that our common formula signifies". This step might have administrative and juridical consequences, but it is at heart an act of faith recognizing faith. The certainty which it offers is personal, mysterious, but in the long run more secure than that offered by formulae that claim to be so clear that they will never require further interpretation and so transparent that outer adherence to them automatically implies inward agreement to them, all possible loopholes having been eliminated.

The Observations would like to see an evaluation of the weight of Anglican documents which seem to contradict or be incompatible with the Final Report. Of course the same could be asked in regard to Roman Catholic documents as well. It must be recognized, however, that in both cases there was and is a development of doctrine which supercedes certain fixed formulations or understands them in a new context and a new light. Just as the Roman Catholic Church will ultimately judge the concordance of the doctrinal statements issued by ARCIC with its own traditional formulations, so too will the Anglican Communion, and the same credence ought to be given to both. The method followed by ARCIC involves a priori willingness to accept that the ecumenical partner is able to and wants to correctly interpret the significance and weight of documents in his own tradition. The Final Report is offered to the two Churches in the hope that the same norms will continue to prevail in the wider dialogue that is now beginning. We know that the SCDF, when it praises ARCIC for avoiding "a sterile polemical mentality", has the same concern at heart.

B/1 1: The Eucharist and the Sacrifice of Christ

The Observations claim that it would have been helpful to find in the Final Report the faith of Catholics "fully" expressed regarding the sacrifice of the Eucharist. It is our conviction that the Roman Catholic faith is sufficiently expressed in the statement on Ministry and its Elucidation (FR 35-36, 41; also cf. 18 - 20). The real presence of the sacrificial act of Christ is clearly affirmed by the anamnesis which is the generally accepted understanding of the mysterious presence of Christ by the theologians. Anamnesis is not just a mere recalling of the past event, but an active involvement from the part of the Church in the sacrificial movement of Christ. Furthermore, the propitiatory value of the Eucharist is sufficiently stated in the statement of Eucharist and its Elucidation, where it says that through the Eucharist "the atoning work of Christ on the cross is proclaimed and made effective" (FR 14) and the Church continues to "entreat the benefits of his passion on behalf of the whole Church." (FR 14) While the Final Report does not use the word "propitiation", it expresses the same reality with other words. (Incidentally, the Final Report does not deal formally with the four traditional values of the Eucharist as expressed in Trent, but it does not deny any of them either).

B/1 2: The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

The Observations regret that the tridentine definition of transubstantiation is not found in the Final Report. Obviously, the Final Report tried to avoid the controversial word "transubstantiation" while professing the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Again, the reality of transsubstantiation is clearly affirmed, as the Observations recognize, but the terminology - which is highly debatable today even among Roman Catholic theologians - remains open. Even Paul VI recognized the validity of such terms as transfinalization and transignification, provided they mean what transsubstantiation wanted to express, namely that this bread is now the Body of Christ. This is clearly the view of the Final Report.

It is true that if certain words are taken in isolation from the whole context (e.g. appropriating bread and wine, associating Christ's presence with the consecrated elements, etc.), they could be misunderstood. But after ARCIC's indication of its true belief in the presence of Christ at several places in the Final Report, such words cannot mean other but that central belief about the Eucharist that Christ is truly and really present in the elements. Further clarification is always possible, but that will be the task of those who explain the succinct text of agreement to the people of both Communions.

In this connection one regrets the Anglican-Lutheran statement of 1972, which certainly does not reflect the view of ARCIC's Anglican participants and, unlike the ARCIC statement, was not submitted to Anglican synodical bodies and much less received their approval, but we cannot judge the work of another commission here. One would expect, however, that the Anglican Communion will have to accept either one or the other view. May we remark that the Anglican-Lutheran statement could be interpreted or expressed in a better way if the remaining bread and wine are considered as "accidents" and not the substance.

B/1 3: Reservation and Adoration of the Eucharist

The Observations objects to the divergence in theological judgements regarding the adoration of the Eucharist, claiming that such adoration is a dogmatic definition of Trent. First of all, Trent's definition refers to the adoration due to the Eucharist, acknowledging Christ's true and real presence in it. In this point there is no divergence from the mind of the Final Report, which acknowledges the permanent presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Divergence in practise and in theological judgement refers to the special devotional form of worship given to the reserved Eucharist and its advisability as a form of worship; but for this reason one cannot fault the Final Report or the Anglican Communion, since neither the first 1000 years nor the Oriental Church follows the same custom of devotions or has the same theological judgements as the Western Latin Church since the thirteenth century.

In regard to the Black Rubric, which had an adventurous history even in the heat of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, most Anglicans would consider it as an historical accident which is not held binding any more by Anglicans in general.

B/II 1: Ministerial Priesthood

The Observations regret that the sacrificial language cannot be found in regard to the priestly nature of the ordained minister. We think, however, that in the section on the Eucharist it was sufficiently made clear that the Eucharist is the sacrificial offering of Christ together with the Church through anamnesis. (FR 13, 19 - 20) the cultic action of the Eucharist is performed by the ordained priest who is therefore truly acting in the person of Christ offering the sacrifice. (FR 35).

B/II 2: Sacramentality of Ordination

The Observations object that the Final Report does not say clearly enough that Orders were instituted by Christ. Present day Roman Catholic sacramental theology sees the institution of the sacraments in a different light than was possible at Trent. Institution of a sacrament by Christ does not necessarily imply a direct and explicit act in the course of the earthly life of Jesus by which he singled out certain words and actions and gave a mandate to his apostles to repeat these words and actions as a sacrament. We are in agreement with the Observations in considering that the historical-critical method does not have the final say in the interpretation of scripture. However scripture scholars and theologians within the Church who are familiar with this method commonly make a distinction between what Jesus explicitly said and did, and what his words and actions implied concerning the intention which may not have received explicit formulation until after the Resurrection, either in words of the Risen Jesus or through the Paraclete (Jn 15: 26, 16; 13) inspiring the primitive community. Thus even if the historical-critical method does not give us warrant to claim that Jesus explicitly founded this or that sacrament, we are at one with

our tradition and with our Anglican partners in affirming that Jesus did institute the sacraments, including that of Orders, at least in this implicit way quite acceptable within the framework of contemporary Roman Catholic theology. The Observations also refer to note 4 of the Ministry and Ordination statement (FR 37), and fear that after all Anglicans refuse to accept that Orders is a sacrament instituted by Christ. Note 4 gives the Anglican interpretation of their own confessional statement and situates the difference between Baptism and Eucharist on the one hand and other sacraments on the other in whether or not they are absolutely necessary for salvation. As Roman Catholics we have no reason to doubt the veracity of what is being said by our Anglican partners in the dialogue on this point.

B/II 3: Ordination of Women

The ordination of women in the Anglican communion certainly creates a new question on the road to reunion. The Final Report has not addressed this particular question which is a newly arising issue, not present in our 400 year old division. This question will have to be faced in both Churches, on both doctrinal and practical/disciplinary levels.

B/III 1: Petrine Texts

The Observations fear that the Final Report wishes to adopt as its effective norm in Scriptural interpretation only what historical criticism maintains, thereby allowing "the homogeniety of the developments which appear in Tradition to remain in doubt," particularly in regard to the role of Peter. The Observations fear that the Final Report's formulations do not conform to Vatican I's statement that Peter received primacy of jurisdiction directly from Christ. The analysis of scriptural data on Peter's role in the Church as found in the Final Report (par. 3-5, FR 81-83) yields a convergence of positive explicit indications that this role was one of leadership. Given the views of ARCIC on what jurisdiction entails (Par 17, FR 88-89), this means in effect that Jesus conferred jurisdiction on Peter personally. While the Final Report underlines at length the centrality of Peter's role among the twelve, it does not believe that the Scriptures provide a basis sufficient to show the transmission of this role to those who would later be bishops of Rome nor the explicit intention of Jesus during his earthly life that such transmission take place. But the Final Report wishes to affirm that the development of papal primacy is legitimate and providential. It is possible to think that such a development, it argues, "is not contrary to the New Testament and is part of God's purpose regarding the Church's unity and catholicity" (FR 84). In fact, then, the Final Report argues in favour of a positive appreciation for the Church's tradition on this point, not against it. While this positive appreciation uses a different language and conceptual structure than do the formulations of Vatican I, its substantial agreement with the reality affirmed by Catholic tradition should not be missed.

B/III 2: Primacy and Jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome

The Observations again use the language of Vatican I to criticize the Final Report, arguing that it does not respect the exigencies of the term "institution", which require that Jesus himself provided for the universal primacy, the Observations seem to want to insist that this institution occurred directly and explicitly by action of the historical Jesus during his life on earth. While agreeing with the importance of showing the christological basis for papal primacy, and even Christ's general intention for a ministry of unity in the Church, we think that these goals can be achieved securely by locating the institution of papal primacy in the unfolding interpretation of Christ's life in which the primitive Church engaged under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ. Current Roman Catholic theology links the institution of some of the seven sacraments not to the direct action of Christ during his earthly life, but to the interpretation of the will of Christ and the development of the meaning of the Christ event by the primitive community under the guidance of the Spirit,[2] a point to which the Observations draw our attention in the preceding section. If theology does not insist that the historical Christ directly instituted each of the seven sacraments, it can hardly insist on this for the institution of the papal primacy. When Vatican I used the word "institution", it of course did not have available to it the developmental and historical perspective of Vatican II: it simply wished to emphasize that papal primacy is part of the will of God for his Church. But the Final Report also expressly wishes to affirm this point, while using historical and developmental language to do so: "We believe that the primacy of the bishop of Rome can be affirmed as part of God's design for the universal koinonia" (FR 88).

We are in sympathy with the Observations desire to show that visible unity is "not something extrinsic added to the particular churches" and hence that papal jurisdiction over the churches is "not something which belong to it for human reasons nor in order to respond to historical needs". The Final Report itself understands that papal primacy helps to effect unity, describing the universal primate as "the sign of the visible koinonia God wills for the Church and an instrument through which unity in diversity is realized." (FR 86) "Communion with him," it writes, "is intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church, and as a sign of the communion of all the churches." (FR 58) We agree with the Observations and the Final Report, then, in understanding unity to be an organic ecclesial reality, not a juridical imposition from outside of the particular churches. But when the Observations speak of the office of unity as a "constitutive part of the very nature of the Church", denying that there might be a Church which lacks nothing from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church except that it does not belong to the visible manifestation of full Christian communion which is maintained in the Roman Catholic Church, it undermines the longstanding recognition that the Orthodox Churches are in communion with the Church of Christ; in the Roman Catholic view, they lack only a visible sign of this communion. In addition, Vatican II understands the Church of Christ to be a communion of particular churches, each of which is fully Church in itself and manifests this

ecclesial character in a visible way by its communion with other local churches through the petrine office. Because of its understanding of the Church as a communion of particular churches, Vatican II was able to evaluate more positively the ecclesial status of Anglican and Protestant Churches despite their lack of some ecclesial elements, including a visible sign by which to manifest their communion in the one Church of Christ.

B/III 3: Infallibility and Indefectibility

The Observations note the difference between the Final Report's use of "indefectibility" (citing "Authority I", par 18, FR 61-62), and Vatican I's use of the term, evidently of "infallibility". ARCIC itself was aware of this difference. In "Authority I", at the point the Observations cite, ARCIC does wish to speak of the pope's exercise of infallibility, the topic of Vatican I's pastor Aeternus. It notes, however, that the sense of the term "infallibility" is conveyed in the discussions on the possibility of restating the original apostolic words in new ways and on the protection from error which is given to ecumenical councils (FR 65, note 3, referring to par. 15 'FR 59-60' and par. 19 'FR 62').

ARCIC returns to the discussion of infallibility in more detail in "Authority II" where, after first reminding readers of the indefectibility of the Church (note 3, FR 91), it then goes on to discuss the reality of infallibility in the Church's life (FR 92-97). "Authority II" avoids the use of the term "infallibility" when possible, due to its misleading connotations; this may cause some readers mistakenly to conclude that the reality is not dealt with.

The Final Report understands that either a council or a universal primate can make a decisive judgement in matters of faith, and so exclude error (par. 26, FR 93). It understands that "the assent of the faithful is the ultimate indication that such a judgement has been made, i.e. that infallibility has been exercised (Par. 25, FR 92). For ARCIC, this assent is the ultimate indication or sign that a particular judgement has excluded error because it shows the consensus of the whole Church in the truth, a sign which the ancient Church understood as the testimony of the Holy Spirit. However, the ARCIC does not wish to undermine the authority of a universal primate the process of the Church's exercise of infallibility. While it understands that the whole Church has responsibility for preserving the Church from fundamental error, nevertheless it recognizes that at times this responsibility is exercised on behalf of the whole Church by a universal primate, an exercise which need not stifle the freedom of the persons in the Church (par. 28 FR 94). In addition it acknowledges that "it would be incorrect to suggest that in controversies of faith no conciliar or papal definition possesses a right to attentive sympathy and acceptance until it has been examined by every individual Christian and subjected to the scrutiny of his private judgement" (par. 31, FR 97).

The Observations find a divergence from Catholic doctrine in one sentence which states historic Anglican hesitations about a certain view of papal infallibility (par. 31, FR 96-97). To understand this sentence, however, it must be place in its context within the whole Report. The Final Report follows the noted sentence with two others, beginning

"Nevertheless...", which show the willingness of Anglican members of ARCIC to acknowledge the weight with which a universal primate's teaching must be regarded. Some Anglicans have exagerated the claims of Vatican I on papal infallibility. But Vatican I itself sets conditions on the exercise of infallibility by the pope. Only when these conditions have been fulfilled, as the Final Report correctly notes, do Roman Catholics conclude that the judgement is preserved from error and the proposition true (par. 29, FR 95).

In addition, it must be said that paragraph 25 of Authority II (FR 92) provides the most significant context in which the aforesaid sentence is to be interpreted. In it Roman Catholic as well as Anglican members of ARCIC agree that reception of a definition by the faithful is the final sign that the definition has been preserved from error by the Holy Spirit, though not the first means by which the definition acquires authority (par. 25 FR 92). The Final Report's statements on reception and the preservation of the Gospel in the Church in Authority II, paragraphs 23-28 (FR 91-94) should be understood as the theoretical framework within which ARCIC members then try to answer historic objections of both Communions to reunion.

The Observations remark that infallibility refers not to truth but to certitude: it wonders how certitude or assurance could be achieved if the source of authority is not found in the subject expressing a definition, such as a council or universal primate. The relatio to Lumen Gentium, article 12, however, explains that indefectibility refers to the continuation of the Church, and infallibility to the truth which it proclaims.[3] It is the supernatural virtue of faith in God and His Word, rather than the authority of any created subject, which is the basis of our certitude; it is this faith which allows us to recognize as conforming to God's Word those papal definitions which are exercises of the Church's infallibility. Post-reformation theology at times too polemically overemphasized the authority of the created subject(s) proclaiming, set in contrast with the content of his (their) proclamation; but this is a distortion of Catholic tradition. Thomas Aquinas taught that bishops are believed by the faithful only insofar as they articulate the same faith which the apostles and prophets left in their writings.[4] Pastor aeternus continues this Catholic tradition when it insists that the pope in defining dogma cannot add to the deposit of faith, he can only clarify it.[5]

The Final Report, then, also makes clear that "no teaching authority can add new revelation to the orginal apostolic faith" (par. 23, FR 92). It is not to undermine the authority of a universal primate, then, but to clarify its sources and limits, that the Final Report states, "The Church's teaching authority is a service to which the faithful look for guidance especially in times of uncertainty; but the assurance of the truthfulness of its teaching rests ultimately rather upon its fidelity to the Gospel than upon the character or office of the person by whom it is expressed" (par. 27, FR 94). Hence, for example, Roman Catholics do not assent in faith to the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary as dogmas of the Church primarily because a universal primate has defined them: they assent to them, rather, because they recognize in them the apostolic faith which the pope is bound to proclaim.

On the other hand, perhaps the concern of the Observations is with certitude in a less strict, more psychological sense. The Final Report, however, does seem to share this concern as well, when it acknowledges the value that authoritative teaching can have as guidance in uncertain times, and when it takes a generally positive attitude toward the role of teaching authority.

B/III 4: General Councils

The Final Report distinguishes between two kinds of conciliar statements: those which formulate central truths of salvation, regarding fundamental matters of faith; and those which relate to less central matters. Christian belief holds that only the first are protected from error; the second, while important for the mission of the Church and included within the general mandate of bishop as teachers and judges within the whole Church, are among those statements from general councils which "sometimes have erred" (FR 71). The Final Report here is not suggesting that bishops in council must restrict themselves to consideration of only fundamental matters of faith: it rather wants to do what the Observations wish, i.e. "to distinguish in the conciliar documents between what is truly defined and the other considerations which are found there."

B/III 5: Reception

As we have noted above, ARCIC in "Authority II", par. 23-28, gives a theoretical framework within which it understands the exercise of infallibility; in par. 29 - 32, it states historic differences of emphasis between the two Communions which it believes can be overcome by the vision provided in the theoretical framework. The sentence noted by the Observations in Authority II, par. 29, is an example of such an historic difference in emphasis.

The Final Report's understanding of the process of reception follows a recent scholarly consensus among not only Anglican but also Roman Catholic theologians.[6] The Final Report follows this consensus when it understands reception to be the final manifestation that a particular statement is an exercise of infallibility. Along with Pastor aeternus the Final Report excludes juridical "gallicanism", which would make reception an act juridically constitutive of infallibility; it was to exclude this juridical notion of reception that Vatican I added to Pastor aeternus the phrase "exese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae, irreformabiles."[7] Vatican I, however, did not intend to exclude the process of reception from the means by which infallibility's exercise is discerned.[8] Hence we believe that the Final Report is not in disagreement with Pastor aeternus on this point.

Lumen gentium repeats customary teaching in distinguishing between "religious assent of the soul" - due to all teachings of the bishops and in a special way to the authentic teachings of the pope - and the assent of "the submission of faith" - due only to exercises of the Church's infallibility by them.

The process by which the Church exercises its infallibility is a complex one. The Final Report tries to show the delicate balance between the role of authoritative statements by a council or a universal primate on the one hand, and the responsibility of the whole Church for preserving the Gospel on the other hand. It thus envisions that a council or universal primate might be assisted at a time of crisis to articulate the one apostolic faith which the Church holds. Because the Final Report sees this articulation as the exercise by those in office of a gift given to the whole Church, it sees in reception a kind of final indication that the articulation really is in accord with the faith of those for whom it speaks. This sense of conciliar and papal infallibility, though not understood clearly by all the manualists immediately after Vatican I, has become a widely accepted interpretation today of Roman Catholic theologians studying Vatican I.

C/1: Apostolic Succession

The Observations would like a lengthier discussion of apostolic succession than is provided in "Ministry", par. 16. While all of the points discussed in the Final Report could be discussed more fully, we find that its treatment of apostolic succession says enough to show substantial agreement on the nature of apostolic succession. The further question - whether a particular Communion's ordained ministry in fact stands in succession to the apostles - is a question which can only be answered by an analysis of the Communion's theology and practise on other central doctrinal issues. It is this analysis which ARCIC has tried to provide in its Final Report.

C/2: Moral Teaching

We look forward to an expansion of the ecumenical dialogue to include discussion of moral teaching, but we agree with the Final Report that "some difficulties will not be wholly resolved until a practical initiative has been taken and our two Churches have lived together more visibly in the one koinonia"(FR 98). We find a great deal of agreement between our two Communions on moral teaching, and we have found Anglicans receptive dialogue partners, eager to learn from the emphasis of the Roman Catholic tradition. Vatican II's discernment of ecclesial elements in the life and practise of churches outside of the Roman Catholic Church should also make us open as well to the insights of those churches in moral teaching.

D: On the Agreement and the Next Step

While we acknowledge that there are still matters of importance that need to be discussed before substantial agreement on all pertinent matters reaches a state of full achievement, we have tried to show how many of the Observations' objections to the Final Report are based on a misunderstanding of the Report and on a terminologically rigid understanding of Catholic dogma which is not mandatory within the Roman Catholic Church. The assessment by the members of ARCIC of the extent and quality of agreement reached in their dialogue and expressed in their Final Report is to our mind well-founded.

We are in agreement with the Observations on the advisability of further steps to be taken. We would offer the following suggestions.

a) While the Observations guardedly envisage that the continuation of the dialogue will be fruitful, we prefer the more optimistic stance reached by Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury who are willing to envisage the practical steps to be taken when the dialogue has been successfully completed.

b) on the basis of what has already been solidly achieved by ARCIC, we are convinced that at the very least a recognition by the Roman Catholic Church that the Anglican Communion is on the same ecclesial basis as is attributed to the Orthodox Churches in the Decree on Ecumenism is indicated. This would imply a recognition of their orders and the same practical provisions on intercommunion as the Roman Catholic Church is willing to offer the Orthodox Churches. This closer knitting together is needed to create the experiential conditions by which the resolution of outstanding difficulties becomes effectively possible.

c) While the dialogue is to be extended to other areas, let us not fall into the error of supposing that detailed explicit agreement on all points on which divergence is even remotely possible is required before concrete juridical steps to bring us closer can be taken. The Decree on Ecumenism endorses a legitimate variety of theological expressions of doctrine, Church discipline, rites, and spirituality (Par. 15-17), and our attitude should be one of affirming and rejoicing in this richness rather than niggardly seeking out possible deviations behind every agreed statement and eclesial practise.

d) Above all let us follow Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism when it states: "In order to restore communion and unity or preserve them, one must impose no burden beyond what is indispensible (Acts 15:28)" (Par. 18) It is our fervent hope that this fair-minded and tolerant attitude of the first Council of Jerusalem be uppermost in the minds and hearts of our bishops and people as they are faced with the precious opportunity to advance the cause of unity with our Anglican brothers and sisters.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Mysterium Ecclesiae; cf. Pope John XXIII's opening speech at Vatican II.

2. For example, Karl Rahner, The Church and the Sacraments (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), pp. 41 - 74.

3. For a discussion of this relatio, see Harry McSorley, "Some Forgotten Truths about the Petrine Ministry", Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 11 (1974), 225

4. De Veritate, q. 14, a. 10, ad 11.

5. Pastor aeternus, chap. 4 (DS 3070).

6. For example, Yves Congar, "La réception comme realité ecclésiologique", Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques 56 (1972): 369 - 403; Aloys Grillmeier, "Konzil und Reception. Methodische Bemerkungen zu einem Thema der ökumenischen Diskussion," Theologie und Philosophie 45 (1970): 321-52.

7. Pastor aeternus chap.4 (DS 3074)

8. This widely held interpretation is given, for example, by Heinrich Fries and Johannes Finsterhölzl, "Infallibility", Sacramentum Mundi, Vol 3. (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1969), p. 135.