

A Report on Responses made by Episcopal Conferēces
to the Final Report of the
Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

Introduction

In March 1982 Cardinal Willebrands wrote to the episcopal conferences of the world asking for their reactions to the Final Report of ARCIC-I. In his letter, he asked them "to send a considered judgment on the work done, observe all as to whether it is consonant in substance with the faith of the Catholic Church concerning the matters discussed."

Over the last three years the following eighteen responses have been received by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity:

Australia (12 pages); Brazil (3 pages); Canada (7 pages); China, Taiwan (1 page); England and Wales (14 pages); France (19 pages); West Germany (20 pages); Holland (8 pages); Japan (11 pages); Liberia/Sierra Leone/The Gambia (12 pages); New Zealand (8 pages); Nigeria (2 pages); Scandinavia (5 pages); Scotland (17 pages); Southern Africa (6 pages); Switzerland (16 pages); USA (12 pages); Greek-Melchite Patriarchate (21 pages).

The East German Conference wrote to the Secretariat saying they would not be submitting a response, and identifying themselves with the Observations of the CDF.

It is probably important to note that although the number of responses is not large, we have received responses from practically all those parts of the world where the Anglican Communion is a significant presence.

There was considerable variety of length, approach and focus among the responses. Nonetheless there is a considerable degree of consensus in the evaluation of the Final Report. The purpose of this paper is simply to give a general idea of what the response of these conferences has been. The Greek Melchite response is quite different in approach from the others and I have simply referred to it in a note at the end.

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General Evaluation

All the responses speak very positively about the work and about the achievement of ARCIC-I; they see the ARCIC dialogue as an especially significant one and as an example of effective ecumenical work. Many are obviously quite surprised at the degree of agreement that ARCIC was able to realize. Many also see the Final Report as a decisive moment - a milestone - in relations between the two Churches.

Presentation of the Report

A few responses commented on the structure of the Final Report, and saw the need for editorial revision. One response felt that the report comprised several different kinds of statements (statements of agreement; elucidations; statements of convergence) so as not to comprise a coherent whole. Some saw the need for further editorial work in which the elucidations would be integrated with the actual statements; this could have the effect of making the Commission's viewpoint clearer.

Approach and Methodology of ARCIC

(a) Several responses commented on the significance and potential that the ARCIC Commission found in the notion of Koinonia. It enabled differing views of the Church to be brought into complementary relationship with one another, especially the Church as divine institution and the Church as a gathered community, brought into being by the Holy Spirit. Some saw the need to relate the idea of koinonia to the issue of primacy, thus directly posing the question of the importance of the petrine office for the unity of the koinonia.

(b) Likewise, there was commendation for the way that ARCIC drew on the findings of biblical historical criticism while seeing the historical data as an unfolding of God's purpose in history in the power of the Holy Spirit. Differing theological methodologies were fused by this method which enabled the findings of historical research to be integrated with the viewpoint of fundamental theology. Some responses, however, saw a lack of resolution here, given the great store set by Anglicans on the findings of historical research. The way one response put it was that what is at issue is two different ways of identifying truth, ways which need to confront one another directly. And there was one voice which saw in ARCIC a lack of resolution on the nature of Tradition, to the extent that ARCIC seemed to confine Tradition to Scripture.

(c) ARCIC's claim in the Final Report is to have reached substantial agreement on eucharist and ministry. Several responses commented on the notion of substantial agreement and stated the extent to which they thought ARCIC actually realized it. The term is defined in Eucharistic Elucidations, 2: "It means that the document represents not only the judgment of all its members -- i.e. that it is an agreement -- but their unanimous agreement on 'essential matters where it considers that doctrine admits of no divergence.'" Some responses expressed approval of this definition, noting that it is based on a distinction between what belongs to the faith and what belongs to its interpretation. But there was some feeling that we are still in a position where we need to isolate those matters that are "strictly of the faith" by means of a "hermeneutic of unity".

Most responses said positively that they thought that ARCIC was justified in claiming substantial agreement on eucharist and ministry. Certainly, it was generally felt that the documents contain nothing that contradicts the Catholic faith. But there were a few who, for reasons that will emerge presently, felt that the claim was premature.

(d) Considerable attention was paid to the method adopted by ARCIC to secure substantial agreement. Several responses referred to the Pope's address to the Commission in September 1980 in which he referred to this matter: "Your method has been to go behind the habit of thought and expression born and nourished in enmity and controversy to scrutinise together the great common treasure, to clothe it in a language at once traditional and expressive of the insights of an age which no longer glorifies in strife, but seeks to come together in listening to the quiet voice of the Spirit."

The general feeling was that this method has worked. Concepts and categories have been chosen which are not the exclusive legacy of either Church, but through those concepts we have reformulated our formulations of our joint heritage. Although our doctrine of eucharist and ministry is not treated exhaustively in the Final Report, we are able to find the essential elements of those doctrines in the new formulations.

Several responses pointed to the need to trace and determine the relationship between the ARCIC formulations and the formulations to which our Churches are already committed. We must not, however, look for exact correspondences, especially since our traditional formulations developed in a time of polemic. What we must expect, though, is coherence of meaning between the two.

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Specific Issues

EUCCHARIST

By and large the responses see the ARCIC statement as an adequate presentation of Catholic faith in the eucharist.

Eucharist as Sacrifice

The general view was that the notion of Koinonia and, more especially, anamnesis had been successfully exploited so as to clearly demonstrate both the once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice and the sacrificial nature of the eucharist. Anamnesis, or memorial, is an idea which bears closely on the idea of sacrament: what it is able to show is that the eucharist is not a repetition of calvary, and that it is both symbolic and real.

It was also felt by some, however, that ARCIC's account left us with rather a passive understanding of the eucharist; it is basically presented as a gift to the Church. What is also needed is a sense of the eucharist as a celebration of the whole Body of Christ, "totus Christus, caput et corpus". And there were some who wondered whether in fact the Catholic understanding of eucharistic sacrifice -- especially its propitiating/intercessory aspects -- is adequately expressed.

The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

Generally the responses find in ARCIC a sound and, indeed, moving expression of Catholic faith in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist. It was seen to be both balanced and unambiguous. A few said, however, that some of the references to the nature of Christ's presence in the eucharist are not really sharp enough from a Catholic point of view. Some noted a difficulty in that in the Anglican-Lutheran Pullach Report of 1972, it is affirmed that in the eucharist "bread and wine, while remaining bread and wine, become the means whereby Christ is truly present". None of the responses, however, said that this necessarily represents an incoherence in the Anglican position. One response offered an account of how the two statements may be reconciled with one another, along the lines that the point which Catholic faith must affirm is precisely that the substance of the consecrated elements is no longer bread and wine.

On transubstantiation, the general impression was that the burden of this doctrine is affirmed although the actual word is not used. The truth that the word "transubstantiation" intends to convey is effectively secured in the text. One or two felt that the distinction between the fact and the how of eucharistic change cannot be drawn as readily as ARCIC does if Catholic faith is to be unequivocally affirmed.

Reservation and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

There was something of a feeling of disappointment that ARCIC could not have been more positive in this question, especially given the strong position adopted on Christ's presence in the eucharist. Some saw this as reflecting negatively on the depth of agreement reached, and generally it was felt that the matter needs to be taken up again and explored further. Quite widely, however, it was felt that eucharistic devotions are a consequence of faith in the eucharist and not a component part of it, provided there is agreement on the essentials of faith and provided the practice and sensibilities of both sides are respected, we do not need to press non-Catholics on the question of eucharistic devotion.

MINISTRY

Origins and Institution of the Ministry

There was widespread approval of ARCIC's approach to this matter. Many responses identified with the view that belief in Christ's institution of the ministry does not necessarily entail believing that this involved an explicit act of Our Lord during his earthly life; rather, it is sufficient to affirm that there has been episkopè ever since the commissioning of the apostles and that the subsequent development and stabilizing of the ordained ministry took place in the power of the Holy Spirit and according to the will of Christ. A few expressed difficulty with the perspective adopted by ARCIC and wondered whether it was able to fully secure the reality of Christ's institution of the ministry.

The Sacramentality of Ordination

Generally it was felt that ARCIC presents well both the distinction and the connection between the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of all believers. A few expressed hesitation and one made the point that ARCIC's perspective on ministry, by being somewhat functionalist, is not able to show clearly enough the organic character of the ordained ministry within the common priesthood of the whole Church. The more general view, however, was that the sacramental nature of ordination receives abundant testimony, and that this is an extremely important point of agreement.

The Ordained Minister and the Eucharist

Broadly speaking, there was approval of ARCIC's treatment; it corresponds well with the Catholic understanding of the meaning of priesthood in relation to the eucharist.

The Ordination of Women

Two points were made by several responses. One was that the question of the nature of the ordained ministry and the question of who can or cannot be ordained, are not able to be isolated from one another. There is therefore some concern about ARCIC's making this separation in its brief reference to the issue. Secondly, it was affirmed that this is an area of major difficulty and must now be confronted directly.

Validity of Anglican Orders

Only a few responses refer to this matter directly. Those who do generally agree that the problem has now been placed in a new context and that we need now to explore the implications of the new context.

Here, we may note that very few responses refer to the question of apostolic succession. Those that do find ARCIC's treatment balanced and sound, if rather underdeveloped. And, finally, one response said that the treatment of episcopè in ARCIC is inherently problematic because for Catholics ministerial fellowship is only shared by those who are "in hierachical communion with the head and members of the college" (Lumen Gentium, 21).

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

General Reactions

The responses are very complimentary to the ARCIC Commission for its way of handling this topic. The question of authority is set in the context of the authority of the Church and the People of God. The right framework for study has been set up, important ground has been made, and further agreement should now be possible. One response did make the point, however, that the report deals with Anglican difficulties with authority in the Catholic Church, but not with Catholic difficulties with authority in the Anglican Church.

Authority of General Councils

Some responses saw a difficulty in ARCIC's assertion that General Councils are protected from error when they speak on "fundamental matters of faith". A desire was expressed for clarification of the term "fundamental matters of faith" and some made the point that a Catholic would see the guarantee from error as applying to the whole realm of faith and morals.

Petrine Primacy

A few responses commented on the way that ARCIC handled the "petrine" texts in the New Testament. Mostly the responses reacted positively but some wished to underline the point that any historical-critical assessment of a text must be related to the significance it has been given in the living tradition of the Church.

Many responses addressed the question of the institution of the petrine office. As with the institution of the ministry, several responses identified with the view that belief in Christ's institution of the petrine primacy does not necessarily entail believing in an explicit intervention by Our Lord during his earthly life. Some felt happy with ARCIC's perspective which they saw as affirming the presence of the risen Christ and his Spirit in the Church, bringing about a gradual deepening and appropriation of the life and teaching of Jesus. Others saw the need to affirm more clearly that the petrine office is not the result of a purely permissive providence, but is rather a grace willed by Christ for his Church, as a focus of unity for the koinonia.

Further doubts were expressed about the material under the heading of Ius Divinum in Authority II. Several said that the force of "iure divino" in this context needs to be more clearly acknowledged: what is at issue is that petrine primacy pertains to the reality, the nature, the very mystery of the Church as intended by Our Lord. Several made the point, however, that we must be very appreciative of the good framework for further agreement on petrine primacy that we find in the text. The Final Report does isolate the central and essential features of the petrine ministry. Moreover, those responses that commented on the treatment of jurisdiction felt that it fitted pretty well with Catholic ecclesiology.

Infallibility

On this question, there was positive reaction to the interpretation of infallibility, but a general feeling that the Final Report leaves some important aspects of the matter unresolved. Some noted especially that the report does not really reflect the Catholic belief in divine assistance as necessarily attached to the teaching office of the Pope.

On the related question of reception, several responses made the point that this is a theological question that is not widely understood and has not been much investigated theologically, either in the Catholic or the non-Catholic context. It needs to be studied more deeply. Several responses affirmed that what Catholic theology cannot allow is that the faithful are in a position to adjudicate

as to whether a particular teaching corresponds with Revelation: the reality of reception is something that can only be verified post-factum -- after it has been realized. But what we need to consider more precisely is the structure of the process of reception.

Marian Dogmas

On this, several responses noted that the main concern of Anglicans is not the content of these doctrines, but the fact of their being proclaimed as dogmas and the process whereby this took place. Some felt that the disagreements about the content of the dogmas should now be able to be resolved. Others made the point -- as some suggested in relation to eucharistic devotion -- that we need not insist on complete agreement on these doctrines before moving towards fuller communion. But there must be openness and mutual respect in relation to the holding of these doctrines.

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The Future

Several responses made recommendations for the future work of ARCIC. Some of these topics arise from a perceived lack of resolution, clarity, or agreement in the Final Report: further work was recommended on the nature of the Church, the nature of the transmission of revelation, eucharistic devotion and, generally, authority. One response as mentioned earlier said it would be important to identify those things which are "strictly of the faith" -- the things that we absolutely need to agree upon. Other suggestions were for work in areas that have not yet been covered, e.g. moral questions, or the political problems that could arise in relation to reunion with the Church of England.

Almost all the responses urged greater sharing and collaboration with the Anglican Communion on the basis of the agreement so far secured. Several said that we must now work out some models for unity, some practical steps for moving towards full communion. Among the issues that would need to be tackled here would be the theological basis for some kind of limited or partial sacramental sharing between our Churches.

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Note on the Greek-Melchite Response

This response looked at the Final Report in the light of the principles and "givens" of the Eastern tradition. This, they say, is important since ARCIC seems to have confined itself to a Latin and Western vision of the Church. Especially important for ARCIC's work would have been the Eastern Church's perspective of the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, guiding its constitution and development. Generally the response disapproves of the historical-critical methodology in ARCIC and frequently makes the point that Scripture is only an authority because and in as much as the Church has made it so. The response says that Eastern history and tradition is what would be best able to guide ARCIC in determining the limits of Roman primacy in a Catholic and undivided Church. Despite this critical focus, the response speaks enthusiastically about the achievement of ARCIC and expresses great interest in future developments.

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