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ARCIC Mark 2

The Final Meeting of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) took place at St. George's House, Windsor - in but not of the Diocese of Oxford! - in September 1981. It was then agreed that the Co-Chairmen should write to their respective authorities about the future. Two important and related questions were posed to the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion: whether the Report was generally consonant with the faith of the two Churches, and whether it provided the basis for the next concrete stage in the relationship between the two Churches on the way towards unity?

But the Commission, through its Co-Chairmen, also suggested that while the two Churches were answering these far-reaching questions time should not be lost in the setting up of a new International Commission which could begin its work before final approval was given to the Final Report. It was always understood that if either Church uttered a resounding negative to the Final Report then the new Commission proposed would necessarily have to have its mandate thought out afresh. The fact that the new Commission is now established therefore puts in context the official, but provisional, criticism made just after the publication of the Final Report by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

But the proposals of the old Commission remained only suggestions. On both sides the idea of a new Commission being established before the approval of the old had to be considered. On the Anglican side this was done with some care at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council later in the autumn of 1981. This meeting in effect gave the Archbishop of Canterbury the mandate to speak for the whole Anglican Communion in the establishment of a new Commission. For the Roman Catholic part discussions in Rome between the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (which had sponsored the old ARCIC), the Congregation for the Faith, and ultimately the Pope himself, eventually resulted in an equally enthusiastic agreement that the work towards unity should not stand idle while the Communions made up their minds about the Final Report.

So it was that after the historic Celebration of Faith in Canterbury Cathedral on the 29th of May last year Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie could sign their Common Declaration establishing a new Commission. Its carefully chosen words did not come out of the blue - blue though the sky was throughout that beautiful day - but necessarily reflected the proper procedures of both Churches. Their signatures to the Common Declaration gave theological content to what had happened in the Cathedral. The symbolic and the academic were firmly held together, both needing the other if four hundred years

of bitter estrangement are to be overcome.

The Common Declaration not only established that there should be a new Commission: it also outlined its agenda. This too had been the subject of careful joint discussion between Rome and Canterbury. The new Commission was "to continue the work already begun: to examine, especially in the light of our respective judgements on the Final Report, the outstanding doctrinal differences which still separate us, with a view towards their eventual resolution; to study all that hinders the mutual recognition of the ministries of our Communion; and to recommend what practical steps will be necessary when, on the basis of our unity in faith, we are able to proceed to the restoration of full communion." Commentators at the time noted with some satisfaction that the 'mutual recognition of ministries' unambiguously opened up the question of Anglican Orders.

In the early autumn of last year a joint meeting took place in Rome to work out a more detailed agenda on the basis of the threefold division found in the Common Declaration.

The first area of the new work will be a continuation of the investigation of doctrinal differences. This will include an examination of and response to criticisms of the Final Report from either side, including, of course, the Church of England General Synod views on the subject. So issues such as a projected universal primacy of the

Bishop of Rome as a focus and instrument of universal unity will continue to be discussed. But issues not examined by the earlier Commission will also be tackled. Moral, ethical and social issues, for example, where the laity feel differences particularly strongly. And from the Evangelical wing of the Anglican Communion, Justification by Faith - probably taking into account the agreement already claimed in Lutheran-Roman Catholic discussion. Certainly plenty of doctrinal material for the new Commission to tackle even assuming the convergence already asserted on the eucharist, ministry and authority in the earlier Agreed Statements.

The second area concerns the recognition of ministry, and, as I have already said, includes the old question of Anglican Orders thought to be permanently solved in a negative way by the Roman Catholic Church in Pope Leo XIIIth Bull Apostolicae Curae where the Anglican priesthood was declared to be 'absolutely null and utterly void'. But it is not simply a question of the past. There are important new issues which will now have to be faced if the two Churches with their ministries are to be reconciled: in particular the ordination of women to the priesthood. Ironically, at a time when Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians - and even canonists - can begin to see round or through Apostolicae Curae, a more difficult problem appears on the horizon. One of the most arduous tasks of the new Commission, then, will be to see at what level the negation of the

ordination of women is officially felt to be by the Roman Catholic Church. It is clearly more than discipline: is it as high as a matter of faith?

The third area is concerned with the nature and shape of the hoped for unity between the two Churches. For many years (since the 1920s in fact) the discussion between the two Churches has had as its goal an Anglican Communion 'united but not absorbed' with the Roman Catholic Church. The time has come to give this objective some cash value. There are some questions about Papal Infallibility and Jurisdiction which Anglicans will never be able to examine properly without knowing in more practical terms what they actually involve in terms of structures of authority. At the same time the generality of Anglican Church people will want to be assured that their basic spirituality and Christian practice is not suddenly to be substituted by something which seems alien. The new Commission will therefore have to present an acceptable model of Anglican-Roman Catholic unity to both the Churches. This will be for the long term. But more immediately there is the question of the next actual step the two Churches must take. What would this next stage involve, pastorally as well as theologically? Clearly here the new Commission will have to hold together/as this last question will depend upon the outcome of discussions about the recognition of ministries. It will also be clearly helpful for this part of the Commission's work to be unveiled before the

Anglican Communion finally answers the questions posed by the earlier Commission, especially whether the Final Report is a sufficient basis for the next step forward. It will obviously be easier to answer this if there is something concrete actually proposed by the new Commission.

Once this agenda was duly agreed last autumn both sides, keeping in touch with each other, ^{began to} choose their membership. It had already been agreed that the new Commission needed to be more widely representative than the old. consequently a slightly larger Commission was envisaged. The appointment of representative members of an important ecumenical Commission is no easy task and there are certain procedures to be followed on either side. For the Anglican Communion membership is chosen by the Archbishop of Canterbury in consultation with the Primates of the Anglican Communion through the Secretary-General of the Anglican Consultative Council. On the Roman Catholic side the Unity Secretariat consults with its world-wide membership and then its nominations go to the Pope himself-and other Vatican departments if he chooses - for approval.

All this complete, the new Commission was announced on 13th June. The Co-Chairmen are Bishop Mark Santer, Area Bishop of Kensington, and Bishop Cormac Murphy O'Connor, Bishop of Arundel and Brighton. Both knew each other when they were principals of theological colleges (Mark Santer at Westcott House, Cormac Murphy-O'Connor as Rector of the Venerable English College, Rome).

The Co-Chairmen and Co-Secretaries, together with representatives of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, met on 9th and 10th June to prepare for the first full meeting of the Commission which is due to take place from 30th August - 6th September in Italy.

When the new Commission comes together for the first time it will be tangible proof that the warm emotions and inspiring hopes engendered by the Papal-Archiepiscopal kiss of peace in Canterbury a year ago have borne fruit. At the same time the new Commission will get nowhere without the reconciliation of Anglican and Roman Catholic Christians as a whole. The Pope and the Archbishop pointed to this in Canterbury: it is something we can all begin ourselves.

CJH