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## Morals

The common life which we share in Christ is marked not only by fellowship and sacramental signs but by a moral quality which belongs to the renewed order of creation that has been established through his resurrection. "Common life" means more than a set of resemblances. It is not merely that each of us lives a life that is like the life that the others live. It is, rather, that this life is lived by the community in the first instance, and so by each individual believer who participates in it. The ethos of restored creation is the ground of Christian community; it is what holds us together as the people of God.

One mark of this common life is the sharing of goods. Indeed, the use of the term koinonia at Acts 2:44, 4:32 points directly to this. Those who have a common life put their resources at one another's disposal in some way or other, though how this is done may vary. Another mark, given prominence in the same section of Acts, is a common mind. When we speak of a common mind in relation to practical reasoning, however, we do not mean quite the same as what would be meant in relation to theoretical reasoning. Practical deliberation differs from theoretical reflection in that the question keeps changing: we can never make the same moral decision twice, since each decision becomes an act which passes into history. A common mind in practical reasoning is not indicated by simple consensus on certain propositions (as one might agree, say, on the proposition that sacraments are necessary to the Church). It is a common approach to each new deliberative challenge, presuming on the agreement which we have in Christian truth, and working patiently towards a common decision which will enable us to act together. A common mind, then, will be evidenced by a willingness to undertake, and to go on undertaking, moral deliberation together, whenever questions that demand practical resolution arise. And so we must ask: do we have a common approach sufficient to enable our two Churches to serve Christ together in this way?

Our answer is that we do; that there is no fundamental difference in our concepts of how moral decisions are reached which will stand in our way. (Difficulties about the structures of authority in our two Churches will, of course, cast their shadow over moral questions too; but there is no disagreement about moral authority as such.) What we have found is that traditional differences of nuance and emphasis give rise to caricatures, of Roman Catholic ethics on the one hand as oppressively authoritarian, and of Anglican ethics on the other as irresolutely relativist. Not only are these differences merely, in our opinion, ones of emphasis; but they do not represent monolithic or unchallenged traditions within the Churches and have varied considerably during the 400 years of our separation. We may observe four of them:-

1. While the Church is still wrestling with a moral question, we tend to conduct the process of deliberation differently. The Roman Catholic Church makes much use of provisional statements from the teaching authority which sum up the Christian view of an issue pro tempore and give practical guidance to the faithful to serve until the question should have developed further. Anglicans, on the other hand, make comparatively greater use of purely consultative documents which carry no authority and often reach no decision. But this does not mean that Anglicans never make authoritative statements on morals, nor that Roman Catholics never improve on positions once propounded.

2. We have tended to conceptualise moral norms and decisions differently. Roman Catholics have traditionally laid greater emphasis on the analogy between moral values and law, and so have organised their moral thinking in a more legal pattern. Anglicans have laid greater stress than Roman Catholics on the role of subjective motive in the characterisation of a human act. But this is not to say that Anglicans have found no use for thinking of morality as a kind of law, nor that Roman Catholics have failed to appreciate the importance of the subjective motive.

3. The different pastoral context, in which the Anglican Church for most of its history has made little use of the confessional, has thrown the burden of moral self-examination within Anglicanism on the individual believer reflecting alone, whereas the confessor has been on hand in Roman Catholic practice to give direction. Yet again, however, we must notice that from the beginning Anglicans have insisted on the connection between self-examination and the approach to communion, and have offered pastoral help to every believer who needs it. Similarly, Roman moral theology has been strong on the importance of the individual conscience, an emphasis which, paradoxically, was learned from Catholic sources by Reformed and Anglican thinkers in the 17th century.

4. Roman Catholic moral thinking has been governed extensively by traditional concepts where Anglicans have tended to appeal to the Scriptures directly. Even in the 17th century, however, it was apparent to Protestant moralists that the Catholic tradition was sufficiently grounded in Scripture to allow them to make extensive borrowings from its material. In our own time the Scripture-revival within Catholic theology and the growing hermeneutical reflectiveness among Protestant theologians have allowed us to seek together a moral theology which is authentically scriptural without being mechanically so.