

ARCIC III: RECOGNISING THE NEED FOR AN ECUMENICAL GEAR-CHANGE

Paul D. Murray*

The strategies of previous phases of ARCIC bore fruit, in dispelling misconceptions about the other's beliefs and, more profoundly, in demonstrating that, in some important areas, alternate expressions of belief may not be mutually exclusive. Receptive Ecumenism is presented as a way to animate the new phase. Founded on the principle of church as Trinitarian communion, it explicates strategies of self-criticism and mutual learning which can help open a perspective in which Christian churches hear the voice of the other as call to conversion—the life task of the Christian, be it church or individual.

Introduction: the beginnings of a new phase of ARCIC

Those of us called to serve on the third phase of work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III) gathered in May 2011 amidst the profound beauty of life, liturgy, prayer and physical context of the ecumenical monastic community at Bose in Northern Italy. The story, witness, tangible joy and deep appeal of the community provided the ideal context for this first meeting of a new phase of ARCIC's existence, rooting us in prayer and the life of the Spirit and reminding us very clearly that the vitality of Christian life and tradition lies not in steadfast identical repetition but in the preparedness to return to our core calling and to ask what fresh performance of this is required by the specific challenges and opportunities of our times.

As we got to know each other over the first few days and began to form as a group, sharing our stories, hopes, questions and concerns,

* Paul D. Murray is Professor of Systematic Theology & Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, UK. paul.murray@durham.ac.uk

before attempting to discern a way forwards for ARCIC III, many of us referred to the daunting nature of the task that lay ahead.

For myself and my fellow neophytes there was a sense of being mere grasshoppers relative to the ARCIC giants who had gone before us; a sense intensified by the presence amongst us not only of eminent members of ARCIC II such as Adelbert Denaux, Nicholas Sagovsky and Charles Sherlock¹ but also of Bishop Christopher Hill who, in one capacity or another, has participated in every previous phase of ARCIC's existence and who, therefore, represented for us the living memory and embodiment of the tradition of ARCIC.

Beyond this, for all of us, experienced ARCIC members and beginners alike, there was also an appreciation for the fundamentally changed context in which ARCIC III is now being called to operate and the correlative fresh challenges this poses. Prior to arrival, each of us had, on at least one occasion, been faced with the question, 'What's the point?' As one colleague had posed it to me: 'Surely anything that an ARCIC-style process can achieve has already been achieved? Quite apart from the fact that both the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and elements within Anglicanism have been unenthusiastic about those achievements, issues around women's ordination and human sexuality surely now make it impossible to continue with the originating ARCIC concern of seeking to overcome the causes of division with a view to opening the way to full structural and sacramental unity in the foreseeable future.' This is indeed to give sharp articulation to the nature of the specific challenges facing ARCIC III.

On the morning of the third full day, when we might have been tempted to be overwhelmed by a sense of our inadequacy to the task relative both to the stature of our forebears and their achievements and the magnitude of the challenges confronting us, a real, live errant

¹ Very sadly, Charles Sherlock had to depart within the first couple of days of the meeting due to a bereavement. I am grateful to Charles for his many helpful comments on an earlier draft of this short piece, as also those of Nick Sagovsky and Adelbert Denaux.

grasshopper jumped onto the tables at which we were working. We took heart: if we are not the giants on whose shoulders we stand nor, perhaps, are we mere grasshoppers but people of faith called together to discern as truly for our time as our forebears had for theirs the appropriate way forwards in relation to the particular challenges we face; and called to trust that, as held in circles of prayer and as called to share in what is first and last God's work not ours, we will truly be resourced for the task at hand. It was in this sense of the Spirit's call and gift that we turned to consider the rich legacy we inherited and how we might be being called to step out afresh in ARCIC III.

Some characteristic ARCIC strategies

The standard pattern of procedure in ARCIC I & II was annual residential meetings involving a team of officially representative theologians from each tradition working together on key themes traditionally regarded as constituting continuing causes of division (e.g. Catholic understanding of the sacrifice of the Mass relative to Anglican understanding of the sole sufficiency of the sacrificial death of Christ), all with a view to seeking specific ways beyond these historic points of division. Amongst others, four interrelated strategies can be seen to have variously been at work:

- 1) the concern to clear up respective misunderstandings and caricatures of one tradition by the other in the light of nuanced and authentic articulations of each tradition that can open the way to a shared understanding that each does in fact maintain what the other believes to be required in relation to a given aspect of belief and practice;
- 2) the preparedness to acknowledge that the practice of one's own tradition can fall short—and, in practice, historically has fallen short on occasion—of authentic performance and understanding in ways that can appear to justify the distorted caricatures;
- 3) a commitment to exploring what fresh concepts and understanding are now available that might help both

traditions more easily and more clearly to say jointly what they each respectively believe to be important on a given point;

- 4) a related commitment to asking after the extent to which the historically different theological frameworks, languages and emphases of the respective traditions on a given point are more accurately to be seen as just that: different yet complementary emphases and languages rather than irreconcilably contradictory and opposed positions.

A couple of examples might help.

First, let us take the case, already mentioned, of Catholic understanding of the sacrifice of the Mass relative to Anglican understanding of the sole sufficiency of the sacrificial death of Christ. ARCIC I was able to make real progress here both by acknowledging that Catholic practice has indeed sometimes fallen short in this regard (cf. strategy 2 above) and by nevertheless clarifying that when Catholics properly speak of the Mass as sacrificial, it is definitely not intended to propose an additional sacrifice to the sole-sufficient sacrifice of Christ on Calvary but to refer precisely to its sacramental re-presentation and the making present of its transforming effects. Where this dual process of honest recognition and clarification enabled Anglican participants to gain a better, less contentious appreciation for authentic Catholic understanding, it also enabled Catholic participants better to understand justifiable Anglican concerns about possible Catholic distortions and to appreciate that Anglicanism also allows for the sacramentality of the Eucharist relative to the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

In turn, this process of clarifying and correcting misunderstandings (cf. strategy 1 above) was helped by the fact that scripture scholars had made great progress in tracing and understanding more fully the Hebrew roots of the word that is used in the Greek New Testament for 'making memory' (*anamnesis*). What they discovered is that 'making memory' of the saving acts of God in a full, scriptural sense is never simply about recalling the past to mind but about allowing the living force of that great act of God to be present and active: 'making

memory' is about 'making present'. This is a very neat way of giving fresh articulation to what Anglicans and Roman Catholics have always claimed about the efficacy of the Eucharist, but in a way that clearly avoids both the traditional Protestant anxiety about appearing to add something to the death of Christ, and also the traditional Catholic concern that a 'mere memory' understanding of the Eucharist means that it ceases to be a means of grace (cf. strategy 3).

A second example, this time taken from the work of ARCIC II, pertains to the doctrine of justification and, more broadly, respective understandings of God's saving work in Christ and the Spirit. In this regard, the primary concern for Catholics has traditionally been to maintain that the totality of God's saving work involves us in being transformed through grace into the likeness of God (sanctification) rather than our mere forgiveness. For their own part, Protestants have first and foremost wanted to stress that God's forgiveness comes freely without our having to earn it through good works—on this Lutherans, Calvinists and the Church of England's Articles of Religion, for example, are agreed, regardless of what differing emphases might be placed on sanctification. The problem, compounded by differing translations of the relevant terms in the Greek New Testament, is that Catholics have tended to assume that Protestants espouse what Dietrich Bonhoeffer referred to as 'cheap grace' that does not attend to the need for our renewal and transformation. In turn, Protestants have tended to assume that Catholics make God's forgiveness conditional upon our sanctification.

In contrast, recent ecumenical theology, aided by fresh scholarship (cf. strategy 3), such as in the work of ARCIC II on justification and more recently and most clearly in the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, has clarified that these assumptions are based on misunderstandings (cf. strategy 1). Catholics have come to understand and accept that Protestant teaching does in fact, in various ways, emphasise that God's free, forgiving grace brings us to renewal and holiness. Correlatively, the Anglican participants in

Salvation and the Church (1987) recognised that Catholics also emphasise that God's transforming grace is utterly unearned, coming first in forgiving embrace in our situation of incapacity through sin.² Through the combination of clearing up misunderstandings and recognising that not everything always requires to be expressed in the exact same way, respective Protestant and Catholic theologies of justification and salvation have come to appear not as contradictory theological frameworks but as two legitimate and complementary languages or grammars, each saying what the other believes needs to be said, albeit with respectively different emphases (cf. strategy 4). Whilst these are not identical, they can and do map onto each other.³

As this illustrates, these strategies have been hugely successful in showing ways in which to overcome apparently absolute differences between traditions by showing such differences to be, in key aspects, more apparent than real; as resting on misunderstandings about what are correctly viewed as legitimately diverse ways of articulating the same area of Christian truth. In this regard these strategies have been immensely powerful, significant and useful and will doubtless continue to have a key role to play on occasion in relation to specific issues. Equally, as they have been presented here—that is, as modes of reasoned analysis and argument somewhat abstracted from the spiritual, existential, and lived ecclesial and ecumenical contexts in which they have characteristically been put to work—they can also be seen to have their limitations.

In themselves, viewed as modes of analysis and argument, the characteristic ARCIC strategies identified here work primarily not by changing the substance of either party's own belief but by clearing up respective common misunderstandings of each about the other. As such, and even allowing for the predispositions of self-criticism and attentive hospitality to the truth of the other within which they have

² See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19860903_salvation-church_en.html.

³ For further, see Paul D. Murray, 'St Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That', *New Blackfriars*, 91 (2010): 142-70.

characteristically been situated and which they presuppose, they are themselves ultimately best viewed as strategies of clarification and explication rather than of growth, change and conversion *per se*. In substantive rather than perceptual and relational terms they effectively leave things as they are.

That is, at the level of theological understanding, the change (or continuing conversion) promoted by these strategies is largely limited to the fact that we come to think differently about the other due to the fact that we have each been able to express ourselves more clearly and teach the other more effectively about our respective theologies. The point, however, is that such perceptual and relational change can occur without the deeper conversion taking place of one's own tradition being challenged to expand and re-think how it understands and does things in relation to a given issue.

In this regard, the key emphasis placed upon the *Church as Communion* within ARCIC II from 1991 onwards acts as a highly significant and necessary complement to the strengths and limitations of the formal strategies here reviewed.⁴ The timely reminder is that the churches, as called forth by and held within the Trinitarian communion of God, are called to grow more deeply together precisely in this communion.

With this, Charles Sherlock identifies two further ways in which the later cycles of ARCIC II's work recognised and sought to offset the limits of the characteristic composite strategy of seeking to 'get behind' historic divisions.⁵ First he points to what he refers to as the 'double negative' conclusion to the 1994 ARCIC text on *Life in Christ*:

⁴ I am grateful to Nick Sagovsky for reminding me of this point, see http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19900906_church-communion_en.html.

⁵ See Charles Sherlock, 'The Journey—An Anglican Perspective', in Donald Bolen and Gregory Cameron (eds.), *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ: the Text with Commentaries and Study Guide* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006), 204-31.

*Morals, Communion and the Church*⁶ wherein it is both acknowledged that there are areas of continuing disagreement that cannot currently be overcome and nevertheless maintained that these ‘need not constitute an insuperable barrier to progress towards fuller communion’ (§101). As Charles Sherlock writes, ‘the “get behind” method was starting to reveal its limits ... it oriented discussion to the past, from which approach some topics would remain intractable.’ Complementing this is the eschatological rather than merely historical view of tradition that comes into view in *The Gift of Authority* in 1999⁷ and then to fuller development in *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2005) wherein a “future into the present” orientation emerges such that the tradition is not simply measured by how it has been articulated in the past but by all it is understood to be when set within the saving purposes of God in Christ and the Spirit.

It is such shifts and recognitions already present within the work of ARCIC II that are now being extended in the work of ARCIC III.

The changed context of ARCIC III and the need for an ecumenical gear-change: the explicit turn to Receptive Ecumenism

It was already recognised within the later stages of ARCIC II work, that the hugely successful and abidingly significant formal strategies forged in ARCIC I and the earlier phases of ARCIC II, cannot of themselves overcome those areas of real substantive difference between traditions, for example as to whether or not it is possible for a non-ordained person to preside at the celebration of the Eucharist, as figures in Anglican-Methodist dialogue. With the best will in the world and regardless of what deeper and more authentic mutual understanding can be reached, such issues will never be patient of being explained away as alternative ways of expressing the same basic points.

⁶ See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19930906_life-in-christ_en.html.

⁷ See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_12051999_gift-of-authority_en.html.

Nor is this an isolated problem. Many of the issues that now continue to divide the traditions bear closer analogy to the either/or question as to whether or not a non-ordained person can preside at Eucharist than they do to the more integrating question as to whether Anglican and Roman Catholic understandings of eucharistic sacrifice can be seen to be compatible. As such, we are at point where the traditional formal strategies, for all their erstwhile success, have for the time being quite possibly gone as far as they can on most fronts. They are fine for problems based either on misunderstandings or the erroneous assumption that a point can only be expressed in one way and must always be expressed in the exact same way, failing to appreciate that it is not always necessary to choose between alternate expressions. But many of the problems that are now regarded as dividing the traditions simply do not lend themselves to being resolved in this way.

Think, for example, in the Anglican-Catholic context of continuing significant differences over the way in which the communions are respectively structured; of issues about the nature and exercise of authority and associated processes of decision-making;⁸ and, perhaps most obviously, radical differences over whether women can legitimately be ordained. In the latter case in particular, regardless of what one personally thinks on these matters, and regardless even of whether one is seeking to explore how Catholic understanding may, with integrity, develop in these regards, it is clear, to say the least, that formal Catholic understanding is not going to be able to embrace such proposed developments within the ARCIC process.

As such, we are in a fundamentally changed context from that to which ARCIC I and, to a lesser extent, ARCIC II responded. It accordingly became clear to us in the course of the first meeting at Bose that we need a correlatively changed understanding of the appropriate strategy for ARCIC III. In essence, if we are to make progress with the kinds of more intractable problems identified here

⁸ As clearly recognised in *Gift of Authority*, 56-7.

then we need not just increased mutual understanding and appreciation *between* traditions but direct, explicit and effective self-criticism, growth, development, change—continuing ecclesial conversion to the truth of God in Christ and the Spirit—*within* each tradition respectively. Here we need a different strategy that will complement and extend the more familiar ARCIC strategies reviewed above by bringing forth the basic background predispositions of self-criticism and attentive hospitality and setting them centre-stage as a formal strategy in its own right; a strategy, that is, explicitly aimed at exposing each tradition to the challenge of the other.

As has been discussed on a number of previous occasions in the pages of this journal, it is in direct relation to this changed context and its challenges that a fresh strategy referred to as Receptive Ecumenism has come to be formally and explicitly articulated and tested through a series of projects operating out of the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University.⁹ This basic strategy, which is correctly to be viewed as simply bringing to explicit systematic articulation instincts and principles that have long lain at the heart of the ecumenical movement, has subsequently been taken up and put to work by groups and ecclesial bodies in a wide variety of international contexts.¹⁰ In turn, as indicated in the official communiqué released at the end of the May 2011 meeting, ARCIC III has now explicitly adopted Receptive Ecumenism as providing an appropriate way of proceeding and theological orientation for this next phase of the Commission's work as it seeks to serve its abiding goal of full sacramental and structural unity and of growing more deeply and visibly into real communion in the Trinity.¹¹

⁹ See Murray, 'Recent Developments in Receptive Ecumenism at Durham University', *One in Christ*, 42/1 (2008): 207-11 and 'Receptive Ecumenism and Faith and Order', *One in Christ*, 43/2 (2009): 189-94.

¹⁰ The Third International Receptive Ecumenism Conference will take place from 8-11 July 2013 at Fairfield University, Connecticut, USA on the theme 'Receptive Ecumenism in International Perspective: Contextual Ecumenical Learning'. To register interest, contact ccs.admin@durham.ac.uk.

¹¹ See <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2011/5/27/ACNS4874>.

To summarise what has been said at greater length elsewhere, Receptive Ecumenism accepts the significantly changed ecumenical context in which we find ourselves but remains convinced that Life and Work ecumenism—doing things together—whilst vital, can never be enough; convinced that precisely in this situation we need to retain the aspiration for structural and sacramental unity and to find an appropriate way to pursue this.¹² With this, Receptive Ecumenism recognises that this means that we need to focus on the organisational structures, processes and cultures of the churches and how they are challenged to learn from each other.

At its heart is a J. F. Kennedy style reversal: 'Ask not what your ecumenical others need to learn from you, ask rather what your tradition can learn and needs to learn from your ecumenical others.' This is to transpose the ethic of self-criticism and conversion that lies at the heart of Christian life from the level of personal ethic wherein we are more used to applying it and to apply it to the collective ecclesial level.

In terms of what it means for ARCIC III, alongside and in service of its commitment to deepened ecclesial communion in the Trinity, to be adopting the strategy and methodology of Receptive Ecumenism for this crucial third phase of its work focussed jointly on the relationship between the local and universal levels of the church and on the dynamics and substance of ethical discernment, two implications come immediately into view.

Firstly, in terms of the shape of the work of ARCIC III, it implies that the key question will not be 'How can Catholics and Anglicans seek to come directly to a common mind on issues such as decision making at local and universal levels?' but 'What respective difficulties are there in each of our traditions around decision making and how can these potentially be helped by learning from what is strong in the other

¹² Two key texts are: Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: OUP, 2008); and Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs', *Louvain Studies*, 33 (2008): 30-45.

tradition?' This is to take the kind of question of perceived specific strengths and difficulties in each other's traditions that might characteristically have been engaged at the start of practically any series of ARCIC conversations on a given topic and to give it explicit strategic, shaping-influence and structuring priority over the entire conversation and anticipated outcomes.

Secondly, it means that ARCIC III will both seek to model this process in its own work and seek to stimulate similar processes at all levels of the lives of the churches through creating appropriate consultation documents and resources. Here the process of receptive ecumenical learning and showing forth its transformative potential in clear, useful, attractive and convincing ways is actually more important than seeking to arrive at a theorised conclusion in a convergence statement.

As such, the final statements arising from ARCIC III will very likely include clear acknowledgment of continuing areas of substantial and substantive disagreement between the traditions. It is hoped, however, that what they will also do is to articulate, witness to and serve a process of real receptive, life-giving learning on behalf of each tradition precisely in the context and in face of such continuing substantive disagreement. Each tradition will be called, as an ecclesial spiritual discipline analogous to individual examination of conscience and correlative conversion into greater life, to grow in specific ways in its respective practices and structures of decision-making through effective receptive ecumenical learning.

In terms of what it means for the theology and practice of Receptive Ecumenism that ARCIC III is explicitly taking it up in this way, one bishop-friend wrote to me to the effect: 'Receptive Ecumenism has now moved from being a good idea discussed by some academics and ecumenists with some church support to being embraced by the most significant international bilateral process in the English-speaking world that has in turn tended to influence the methodology of all the other dialogues. It has gone global!'

This needs to be kept in perspective. As indicated earlier, whilst the specific language and systematic articulation of Receptive Ecumenism as an explicit strategy fit for our times might be of relatively recent articulation, it is a way of thinking and acting that has been long incubated in the ecumenical movement and which has, in part at least, been assumed in all good ecumenical work.¹³ If Receptive Ecumenism is indeed fruitful for our time, it represents the coming of age and to full voice of a gift born within and given by all that has gone before in the ecumenical movement. As such, the appropriate attitudes are those of gratitude, rejoicing, humility and confidence that in as much as Receptive Ecumenism is indeed right and fitting for our times, it will be shown so to be by its fruits and, similarly, in as much as it is not, it will in due course be discerned so to be and so be suitably adapted and developed by the community of the church.

In the mean time, it is profoundly engendering of hope to recognise, contrary to the prophets of doom who would write-off formal institutional ecumenism in general and ARCIC in particular as a now redundant exercise, that ARCIC continues to work at the forefront of the ecumenical agenda, exploring and in some respects pioneering a path appropriate to our age. By the grace of God may this work come to fruition in God's good work and God's good time.

¹³ See, for example, Murray, 'Expanding Catholicity through Ecumenicity in the Work of Yves Congar: Ressourcement, Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Reform', in Gabriel Flynn & Paul D. Murray (eds.), *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), forthcoming.