Address to Launch the ARCIC II Volume

*Looking to a church Fully Reconciled*

When the bishops who were to become the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission first met in May 2000, they requested in their “Action Plan” that …

ARCIC consider commissioning a volume of the agreed statements produced since *The Final Report* which would include introductory essays and selections of relevant responses to the texts.

That call was made five years before the final document of ARCIC II was published, and eleven years before the Commission’s third phase, ARCIC III, began its work with the mandate from the standing Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity that it, “promote the reception of its previous work by presenting the work of ARCIC as a corpus, with appropriate introduction”. *Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled, The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission 1983-2005 (ARCIC II)* is the Commission's response to that request.  It has been edited by the three members of ARCIC III who also served on ARCIC II. It has been long called for and long anticipated, and we welcome its publication with thanks and congratulations.

The volume differs markedly from *The Final Report* published in 1982 that collected the agreed statements and elucidations of ARCIC I. That was a much slimmer volume. The excellent theologians who made up ARCIC I produced short, pithy statements on key areas of historically disputed doctrine, asking their respective authorities whether their statements “expressed a unity at the level of faith sufficient to call for ‘closer sharing … in life, worship, and mission.’”

The responses to that text, as we know, both from Catholic and Anglican quarters, called for further work to be done. In taking up this work, the second phase of ARCIC produced much fuller, and therefore longer, documents to demonstrate more clearly the broad basis of agreement that existed between our two communions, as well as to tease out with greater precision areas where differences remain.

Conscious of the work being done by Catholic and Lutheran ecumenists, the first theme taken up by the new commission, ARCIC II, was that of justification. Convinced that Anglicans and Catholics were less sharply divided on this issue than were Catholics and Lutherans. Indeed the conclusion of ARCIC II’s first document, *Salvation and the Church*, is in some sense a pre-echo of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* when it states,

We are agreed that this is not an area where any remaining differences of theological interpretation or ecclesiological emphasis, either within or between our Communions, can justify our continuing separation.

As our Pontifical Council looks to broaden the consensus on the question of justification across the Christian world, there is much promising work in this document that can form the basis for such an expanded agreement on the theology of justification.

In the Preface to *The Final Report*, written in preparation for publication, the members of ARCIC I looked back over the agreed statements that they had produced and noted that a common theme of *koinonia*, Communion had emerged in each of their documents. ARCIC II’s second document, *Church as Communion*, was not intended to tackle an area of historic theological difference therefore, but to expand this base, providing a shared theological platform from which areas of continued difference might be addressed.

In a key section of *Church as Communion* the document sets out what constitutes ecclesial communion. Among these elements it says, “constitutive of life in communion is acceptance of the same basic moral values, the sharing of the same vision of humanity created in the image of God and recreated in Christ” (CC 45). This was the theme that ARCIC took up in its next document, *Life in Christ*. In doing so ARCIC recognised that the theme of morality was one of new and growing divergence within and between Christian communities. *Life in Christ* was able to describe shared, foundational principles based upon the mind of Christ: “Christian morality,” it wrote, “is an authentic expression of the new life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit and fashioned according to the mind of Christ” (LC 31). There remains more work to be done and ARCIC III is taking up this theme again. It is an important and urgent task, to establish a common basis for our moral reasoning.

The subject of authority has never been far from ARCIC’s concerns. *The Final Report* of ARCIC I contained two agreed statements on Authority. *Life in Christ* identified differences on moral questions as directly attributable to difference in the way our two communions developed and exercised structures of authority (LC 37). *Church as Communion* saw itself as providing the basis for tackling the authority question when it said, “an agreed understanding of the Church as communion is the appropriate context in which to continue the study of authority in the Church begun in ARCIC I” (CC 58). *The Gift of Authority* again addressed this vital theme. It is a document that makes remarkable progress, but one which makes challenges of both Communions. Of Anglicans it asks, whether, under certain conditions, they can be open to, and desirous of, “the exercise of universal primacy by the Bishop of Rome” (GA 62). It calls on Catholics to be open to a conversation with and critique from our dialogue partners concerning the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, echoing the words of Saint Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* (96). Much as this document achieved, the work is not yet complete, and the current Commission is preparing ARCIC’s fourth statement on Authority to build on this important work.

The Mississauga meeting that gave birth to IARCCUM and called for this collection of ARCIC texts, also called for an ARCIC document on the theme of Mary. This direct request was answered by ARCIC II’s final document. The title of the document, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, refers to the two Marian dogmas: grace referring to the Immaculate Conception, and hope to the Assumption. It is these two definitions with which the document is chiefly concerned, and it concludes by saying that when they are “understood within the biblical pattern of the economy of hope and grace, [they] can be said to be consonant with the teaching of the Scriptures and the ancient common traditions” (78).

In this brief presentation I have focussed on the five agreed statements themselves, which are presented here for Anglicans and Catholics to reflect upon and to receive. However, there is also much supporting material which has also been provided by the three editors, Rev Nicholas Sagovsky, Rev Charles Sherlock and Fr Adelbert Denaux. Each of the five statements is presented with an appropriate introduction, and an overview of the responses that each elicited. A summary of what future work might be undertaken is also provided. As well as this, there are a number of essays which describe how the Commission has gone about its work and an account of the Commission’s meetings and a list of its members. Among the editors, I have been asked to say a particular word about Rev Charles Sherlock who has led the process of editing and preparing the texts with an unrivalled love and devotion. He is to be congratulated and we owe him a huge debt of thanks.

I hope this book will indeed promote the reception of the work of ARCIC II in both the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church.  I pray that it will help and support the members of IARCCUM in their commitment to witness to the communion we already share, and to work in unity in mission to the world.  And I pray that the members of ARCIC III will be encouraged as they bring to completion their work on 'the Church as communion, local and universal'. May this volume help us look towards and work for a Church fully reconciled.