
ARC-USA/Ecumenism

How Can We Recognize “Substantial Agreement”?

How “substantial” was the agreement reached in the 1982 Final Report of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission? (The Final Report asked the churches to evaluate whether it had reached substantial agreement in the areas of ministry and eucharist, and a high degree of consensus on authority.) A new agreed statement from the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue group in the United States concludes that ARCIC-I indicates that “whatever differences may remain on the issues explored in the Final Report, they would not today provoke divisions between our two churches. Hence they cannot warrant our continuing division.” Thus, says ARC-USA, the different judgments of the two churches on whether the Final Report reached substantial agreement contain encouragement and challenge: “challenge in that we are confronted with our willingness to stay divided over matters that would not initiate a division.” The March ARC-USA statement analyzes the idea of “substantial agreement,” asking, “If an agreed statement does not employ the traditional language of one or both churches, does it thereby fail to express

*adequately the faith of those churches? Some commentators have pointed to the obstacle to ecumenical progress created by one church’s demanding adherence to its own formulation.” (The Vatican’s response to the Final Report appeared in *Origins*, Vol. 21, pp. 443ff; major excerpts from the Final Report appeared in Vol. 11, pp. 693ff.) If the term “substantial” is ambiguous, a larger issue is found “in the assumption that everyone knows what substantial (in the sense of fundamental) agreement would look like,” says ARC-USA. “The intrinsic problem is the complex question of doctrinal language,” it comments. A way to deal with the “puzzle of doctrinal language is to ... recognize that doctrines are expressions of the communal life of the church and that shared life may make differing doctrinal formulas intelligible and reveal them to be compatible and even identical in intent. But such an interpretation means that attempts to share life must precede or at least accompany attempts to compare doctrinal statements. It might even suggest that shared sacramental life must precede or at least accompany attempts to compare doctrine on sacraments.” The ARC-USA agreed statement follows.*

Introduction

1. With the issuance of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission’s Final Report in 1982, a new context was established for Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue, a context shaped in large measure by the invitation for response and reception that accompanied the Final Report. Now that responses have been given by both churches, the context has changed again. We of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation-USA understand this context to be one of continuing study and reception, which we look forward to with hope that further clarifications of the issues addressed by this dialogue at every level will deepen the unity that we already share and bring us closer to that full unity that the Lord intends for his people.

2. In this country, our two churches have been in productive dialogue since 1965. During that time, ARC-USA has issued eight major documents and four texts that were reactions to three agreed statements of ARCIC.¹ It is from this experience that we face the new context. While looking forward in hope, we also recognize among ourselves a range of assessments concern-

ing the import and implications of the two churches' responses to the Final Report. Nevertheless, we find ourselves both encouraged and challenged by this new context, and we hope to stir up in the members of our churches the same sense of encouragement and challenge.

3. Therefore, in this document we will indicate a number of points in the responses that we find both significant and of concern, and we will set forth our own understanding of the path forward in this new context.

Status of the Responses

4. On March 24, 1966, Pope Paul VI and Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey met in Rome and signed a common agreement declaring their intention "to inaugurate between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion a serious dialogue which, founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions, may lead to that unity in truth for which Christ prayed."² Following the 1968 Malta Report of the joint preparatory commission, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I) met for the first time in 1970. In 1982, ARCIC I issued its Final Report, which includes three agreed statements, two elucidations, a further statement on authority in the church and an introduction to the church as *koinonia*.

5. In issuing the Final Report, ARCIC I hoped to help "begin a process of extensive prayer, reflection and study that will represent a marked advance toward the goal of organic union between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion."³

6. Even as ARCIC II began its work on salvation and the nature of the church, the Anglican Communion and Roman Catholic Church each began its own process of study and response to the Final Report of ARCIC I.

7. In the Anglican Communion, in preparation for the Lambeth Conference of 1988, the Anglican Consultative Council⁴ asked each province to consider "whether the agreed statements on eucharistic doctrine, ministry and ordination, and authority in the church (I and II), together with elucidations, are consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans and whether the Final Report offers a sufficient basis for taking the next concrete step toward the reconciliation of our churches grounded in agreement in faith."⁵ The formal synodical responses of 19 out of 29 provinces were summarized and discussed in the Emmaus Report issued in 1987. The Lambeth Conference, meeting the next year, responded to the Final Report by

a resolution in which the conference "recognizes the agreed statements of ARCIC I on eucharistic doctrine, ministry and ordination, and their elucidations, as consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans and believes that this agreement offers a sufficient basis for taking the next step forward ... welcomes Authority in the Church (I and II), together with the elucidations, as a firm basis for the direction and agenda of the continuing dialogue on authority."⁶

8. We note here that the authority of the Lambeth response for Anglicans is not entirely clear. This point arises out of a statement printed in the 1988 Lambeth Conference proceedings (p. 9, No. 1). This statement, which is similar to statements found in Lambeth proceedings since 1888, says that "resolutions passed by a Lambeth conference do not have legislative authority in any province until they have been approved by the provincial synod of the province." At the same time, however, the Emmaus Report emphasizes that "though there can be no question of a legislative or juridical decision, there are moments when the Lambeth conferences have discerned, articulated and formed the common mind of the Anglican Communion on important matters of faith and morals.... In the end the bishops have a special responsibility for guarding and promoting the apostolic faith, a responsibility which is theirs by ordination and office."⁷ The Lambeth Conference of 1988 did recognize "the agreed statements of ARCIC I on eucharistic doctrine, ministry and ordination, and their elucidations, as consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans and believes that this agreement offers a sufficient basis for taking the next step forward toward the reconciliation of our churches grounded in agreement in faith."⁸

"ARCIC I was concerned not to evade the difficulties, but rather to avoid the controversial language in which they have often been discussed.... The Vatican response, however, does not allude to ARCIC I's method."

9. The December 1991 document from the Vatican is the official response of the Roman Catholic Church to the Final Report. It is described as "the fruit of close collaboration between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting

Christian Unity."⁹ Since the apostolic constitution of 1988, *Pastor Bonus*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has had final responsibility in matters of faith and doctrine.

10. When the Final Report was issued in 1982, Cardinal Willebrands, then president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, also asked Roman Catholic episcopal conferences to evaluate the Final Report. He asked for careful study and considered judgment, and requested that the replies of the conferences address the question of "whether it [the Final Report] is consonant in substance with the faith of the Catholic Church concerning matters discussed."¹⁰

11. Since a number of these evaluations were never published and none is cited in the Vatican response, it is hard to determine how much influence these evaluations had on the December 1991 text. The Vatican response, however, would still be the official position of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the Final Report,¹¹ even in the unlikely case that the conference evaluations were not used at all.

12. Where the Lambeth response found "consonance in substance on the eucharist and ministry and ordination," the Vatican response judged "that it is not yet possible to state that substantial agreement has been reached on all the questions studied" by ARCIC I, although the Vatican response considers the Final Report a "significant milestone not only in relations between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion but in the ecumenical movement as a whole."¹²

13. ARCIC I itself claimed only "a high degree of agreement" on authority. With this, both the Lambeth response and the Vatican response seem to concur. Lambeth found ARCIC I's "Authority in the Church" I and II, together with the elucidation, "a firm basis for the direction and continuing dialogue on authority,"¹³ while the Vatican said that "the most that has been achieved is a certain convergence, which is but a first step along the path that seeks consensus as a prelude to unity."¹⁴

14. The Vatican response does not close off discussion of the issues in the Final Report. On the contrary, it encourages further study and clarification (cf. Paragraph 30). Its authors hope that the response itself will contribute to the dialogue that is leading to "the restoration of visible unity and full ecclesial communion" (Para. 34).

15. Accordingly, the Final Report constitutes both resource and agenda in the Anglican-Roman Catholic relationship. Together with the responses to it, the Final Report clarifies certain ques-

tions and poses certain challenges that seem to mark where the next steps must be taken in our journey together.

The Search for a Common Language

16. ARCIC I's method was to engage in serious dialogue on "persisting historical differences" in order to contribute to the "growing together" of the two churches.¹⁵ Therefore, ARCIC I was "concerned not to evade the difficulties, but rather to avoid the controversial language in which they have often been discussed. We have taken seriously the issues that have divided us and have sought solutions by re-examining our common inheritance, particularly the Scriptures."¹⁶ This method was approvingly summarized by John Paul II in his address to the commission:

"Your method has been to go behind the habit of thought and expression born and nourished in enmity and controversy to scrutinize 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 glories in strife but seeks to come together in listening to the quiet voice of the Spirit."¹⁷

17. The Vatican response, however, does not allude to ARCIC I's method. It perceives ambiguities in the language of the Final Report. Thus, it calls for certain clarifications to ensure that "affirmations are understood in a way that conforms to Catholic doctrine [of the eucharist]" (Para. 6). Likewise, it calls for clarification of statements on ordained ministry in the Final Report. The Vatican response seems to urge that clarification be given through the use of language that is closer to and even identical with traditional Roman Catholic theological formulations. (For example, the response identifies a number of points it would like to have "explicitly affirmed." One of these is "the propitiatory character of the Mass as the sacrifice of Christ." The response also asks that clarification be given on a number of matters and cites "the fact that the ARCIC document does not refer to the character of priestly ordination, which implies a configuration to the priesthood of Christ."¹⁸)

18. If an agreed statement does not employ the traditional language of one or both churches, does it thereby fail to express adequately the faith of those churches? Some commentators have pointed to the obstacle to ecumenical progress created by one church's demanding adherence to its own formulation. It seems to us that the Vatican response calls us to more painstaking study of the criteria by which each church should evaluate the language of agreed statements.

The Issue of Substantial Agreement

19. The use of phrases such as *substantial agreement*, *substantial identity* and *consonant in substance* in the Final Report and in the Vatican response to it has been widely criticized as ambiguous. *Substantial* and *in substance* can mean either "in very large part" or "fundamental, basic." In addition, the term *substantial* carries overtones from various historical theological controversies and from its use in scholastic theology.

"We pray the creed together Sunday after Sunday, and as we recite the words of the creed, we assume that the persons surrounding us intend substantially the same as we do. But on what grounds do we make this assumption?"

20. The resolution that makes up the brief Lambeth response to ARCIC I "recognizes the agreed statements of ARCIC I on eucharistic doctrine, ministry and ordination, and their elucidations, as consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans."¹⁹ In formulating this reply, the Lambeth response seems to have taken *consonance in substance* in a broader sense as meaning something like "compatibility." Thus, while the overall evaluation of the Lambeth Conference was positive, it also reported "continuing anxieties" regarding eucharistic sacrifice and presence as well as on 'Ministry and Ordination,' requests "for a clarification of 'priesthood.'" As E.J. Yarnold has remarked: "The point seems to be that a statement is consonant with Anglican faith if it can be said to fall within the legitimate range of Anglican comprehensiveness, though individual Anglicans would be under no obligation to subscribe to it themselves."²⁰

21. The Vatican response, on the other hand, seems to have taken *consonance in substance* as meaning full and complete identity: "What was asked for was not a simple evaluation of an ecumenical study, but an official response as to the identity of the various statements with the faith of the church" (Para. 33). From this perspective, the Vatican response must be understood, then, as claiming that ARCIC I failed to reach agreement on basic issues.

22. The main criterion for judgment used by the churches — consonance in substance with the faith — was identically stated. But, as we have noted

here, the meaning of this phrase varies between the two churches. We suggest, then, that beyond the ambiguity in the term *substantial* there exists a much larger issue which lies in the assumption that everyone knows what substantial (in the sense of "fundamental") agreement would look like and how it might be expressed.

The Issue of Doctrinal Language

23. The intrinsic problem is the complex question of doctrinal language. How does one express the faith of the church? This is, of course, a question with a long history of controversy.

24. What is meant by "the faith of the church"? For members of the Anglican and Roman Catholic communities, the tendency may be to assume, without very much hesitation, that the faith of the church is identical with the official pronouncements of the community, however these pronouncements may be framed. But the fact is that the faith of the women and men who make up our communities is never simply the same as the words of our doctrinal formulas, liturgical forms and catechetical statements. In Roman Catholic theology, a distinction has long been made between the *fide implicita* of the members of the church and magisterial doctrinal statements. What must always be kept in mind is that the saving faith of the church is the concrete faith of the people of God, which the official formulations of the faith are intended to support.

25. Yet two further questions arise: First, how does one know what the faith of any person or any group is, save through that faith's expression in word and deed? Second, by what processes and on what grounds have the words of councils, popes, bishops and theologians come to be accepted as more authoritative than the words of any other believer or group of believers?

26. The first of these questions cannot be answered by appealing to the words of prayer rather than the words of doctrine, for at least as many differences exist in the devotional styles and practices of various believers as in their verbal expressions of faith. The *lex orandi* does not circumvent the question of adequacy of expression that confronts the *lex credendi*.

27. The second question is not simply another way of raising the issue of magisterial authority. The problem to which it points is that the words of official doctrinal and liturgical formulas, as well as the faith statements of any individual or community, all fall short of the mysteries that they seek to express. At best, when Christians

seek to articulate the faith of the church, we deal with degrees of inadequacy.

28. Certainly in our communities we live and pray together in the assumption that there is an agreement which, despite the differences in the ways we express our faith both in words and in practices, is substantial. But how do we know that? We pray the creed together Sunday after Sunday, and as we recite the words of the creed, we assume that the persons surrounding us intend substantially the same as we do. But on what grounds do we make this assumption?

29. The Vatican response's use of the language of official Roman Catholic formulas to test whether agreement has been reached on the substance of faith seems at odds with the practice employed in other ecumenical conversations. For example, few would argue against the statement that the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation are the central articles of the Christian creed and that those articles have received normative expression in the formulas of the first four ecumenical councils.

30. Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church has been willing to join in a common declaration of faith which deliberately avoids conciliar language that has proven controversial. One such declaration was deemed sufficient to permit some sacramental sharing between the Roman Catholic and the Syrian Orthodox churches. In their 1984 declaration, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Zakka I appeal to the Council of Nicaea and then affirm:

"The confusion and schisms that occurred between their churches in the later centuries, [the pope and the patriarch] realize today in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith, since these arose only because of differences in terminology and culture and in the various formulas adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter."²¹

Here the substance of faith is distinguished from culturally determined terminology and the formulas of theological schools, including terminology and formulas worked out and adopted by one of the first four ecumenical councils.

31. From this example, it is apparent that the Roman Catholic Church has found it possible to affirm "substantial agreement" without agreement on specific doctrinal formulas, even when those formulas are as hallowed as the Chalcedonian formula. This common declaration does not indicate how the "substance" of faith is to be discerned when even the formula of Chalcedon is judged a matter of "terminology and culture."

32. This question raises the issue of doctrinal language.

If, indeed, thought is dependent upon language and experience is dependent upon thought, then it is highly problematic to claim that one can distinguish the substance of faith from the culturally determined language of its expression.²² How does one discern the substance beneath the words save through the words? It is a mistake to assume that when one speaks of the mysteries of faith, one can refer beyond the various attempts to speak about those mysteries to the mysteries themselves as if they are simply "there" and available for inspection.

33. One way of dealing with this puzzle of doctrinal language is to accept orthopraxies as the test of orthodoxy; that is, to recognize that doctrines are expressions of the communal life of the church and that shared life may make differing doctrinal formulas intelligible and reveal them to be compatible and even identical in intent. But such an interpretation means that attempts to share life must precede or at least accompany attempts to compare doctrinal statements. It might even suggest that shared sacramental life must precede or at least accompany attempts to compare doctrines on sacraments.

"These questions lie beneath any assumption that the substance of faith is readily available for consultation as the criterion of doctrinal language. These questions must be addressed in the future by our two churches."

34. In any case, the very different understandings of "substantial agreement" in the Lambeth and Vatican responses to the Final Report raise important questions on the understanding of doctrine and the hermeneutics of doctrinal language at work in the dialogues. These questions lie beneath any assumption that the substance of faith is readily available for consultation as the criterion of doctrinal language. These questions must be addressed in the future by our two churches.

The Challenge of Reception in the New Context

35. We understand that the importance of the process of reception was not fully realized in 1966 when Archbishop Ramsey and Pope Paul VI established the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue. How were the commission's agreements to be fully accepted or rejected by each

church? As has been noted above, the Anglican Communion has produced a response of its bishops gathered at the Lambeth Conference of 1988, but while the bishops have "a special responsibility for guarding and promoting the apostolic faith, their response is not a legislative or juridical decision."²³ The dependence of the Roman Catholic Church's response on prior consultations of bishops' conferences remains unclear. We ask whether texts such as the Final Report require new procedures of reception that more adequately reflect our affirmation of the real but imperfect communion in which we already live.

36. The sparse documentation style of the Vatican and Lambeth responses has also complicated the process of receiving them. While the Vatican response is longer and more detailed, neither response contains adequate reference to the materials upon which the responses build. With further documentation, the bases for the judgments expressed would be easier to discern. To this extent, the contribution of the responses to the dialogue could be made more effective than it currently is. We hope that future responses from our two churches will provide the material needed to facilitate understanding, appreciation and acceptance of their judgments.

37. ARCIC I said:

"We are convinced that if there are any remaining points of disagreement they can be resolved on the principles here established. We acknowledge a variety of theological approaches within both our communions. But we have seen it as our task to find a way of advancing together beyond the doctrinal disagreements of the past."²⁴

We take this to indicate that ARCIC I claims "substantial agreement" in the sense that, whatever differences may remain on the issues explored in the Final Report, they would not today provoke division between our two churches. Hence, they cannot warrant our continuing division.

38. Thus, we take our two churches' different judgments on whether "substantial agreement" has been reached as both encouragement and challenge: encouragement, in that both responses rejoice in the notable progress that has been achieved; challenge, in that we are confronted with our willingness to stay divided over matters that would not initiate a division. This reality places in front of us our need for continuous repentance of our willingness to be divided and continuous conversion toward the unity Christ offers us with one another, which is a mirror of his own unity with the Father.

Footnotes

¹ George Tavard, a member of both ARCIC I and ARC-USA from the beginning, has written a helpful historical reflection on ARC-USA's work. We look forward to its publication soon.

² The common declaration by Pope Paul VI and the archbishop of Canterbury, March 24, 1966, in *Called to Full Unity: Documents on Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations 1966-1983*, ed. Joseph W. Witmer and J. Robert Wright (Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1986), p. 3.

³ Herbert J. Ryan, "Foreword to the American Edition," *Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, The Final Report* (Cincinnati/Washington: Foreword Movement Press/USCC, 1982), vi.

⁴ The Anglican Consultative Council was created after the 1968 Lambeth Conference to provide communionwide continuity of consultation and guidance on policy; it has neither legislative nor jurisdictional powers.

⁵ *The Emmaus Report: A Report of the An-*

glican Ecumenical Consultation. (Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 1987), 44.

⁶ Resolution 8, The Lambeth Conference 1988, published in *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, pp. 210-212.

⁷ *The Emmaus Report*, p. 73; cf. Lambeth Conference 1978, Resolution 13.

⁸ Lambeth 1988, Resolution 8.

⁹ Vatican response to ARCIC Final Report in *Origins*, Vol. 21, No. 28 (Dec. 19, 1991), p. 443.

¹⁰ U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Evaluation of the ARCIC Final Report," published in *Origins*, Vol. 14, No. 25 (1984), p. 409.

¹¹ Report of the Catholic Theological Society of America Committee on the Profession of Faith and the Oath of Fidelity, April 15, 1990, pp. 51-2.

¹² *Origins*, Vol. 21, No. 28, p. 441.

¹³ See note 6.

¹⁴ *Origins* Vol. 21, No. 28, p. 443.

¹⁵ *Final Report*, 1.

¹⁶ *Final Report*, 5.

¹⁷ *One in Christ* 16, 341.

¹⁸ Vatican response in *Origins*, Vol. 21, No. 28, p. 445.

¹⁹ See note 5, above.

²⁰ *The Tablet*, Dec. 7, 1991, p. 1525.

²¹ "Toward a Fully Unanimous Gospel Witness," common declaration by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Zakka I of Antioch, June 23, 1984. *Catholic International*, 2, No. 14 (July 15-31, 1991), pp. 662-663.

²² This problem is foreshadowed in John XXIII's opening speech to the Second Vatican Council: "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another." Quoted in Francis A. Sullivan, "The Vatican Response to ARCIC I," *Bulletin/Centro Pro Unione*, 39.

²³ *The Emmaus Report*, p. 73

²⁴ *Final Report*, p. 16. ❖