

# The ARCIC Report

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Thomas More, lately Lord Chancellor of England, was beheaded on Tower Hill on 6 July 1535. Thomas Cranmer, lately Archbishop of Canterbury (who had tried to save More), was burnt to death in Oxford on 21 March 1556. William Allen left England for good in 1565. The 'Roman Catholic Relief Act' was passed in 1829. Anglican orders were declared invalid, in 1896, through defect of both form and intention. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, visited Pope Paul VI in 1966 and they decided to set up a joint theological commission which reported to them two years later (the Malta Report). The first meeting of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) took place at St George's House, Windsor Castle, in 1970. The concluding meeting was at the same venue in 1981. The Final Report<sup>1</sup> appeared, after mysterious delays, on 31 March 1982. Pope John Paul II is due to arrive in England at the end of May. These dates signpost the four hundred and fifty years during which the majority of the people of England and Wales (not to mention Scotland) have been out of communion with the Apostolic See.

The Final Report is now offered to the churches in communion with Canterbury as well as to the churches in communion with Rome, for us all to decide in due course whether the doctrine here set forth is sufficiently consonant with our conscientious understanding of the faith for us to proceed towards "the restoration of complete communion in faith and sacramental life", to quote ARCIC's original statement of intent.

Of course, the assimilation of the Report will take some years. Oddly enough, given Rome's reputation for monolithic organization, it is the Anglican Communion which has the better ecclesiastical structure for articulating an official corporate judgment on the Report. The Lambeth Conference due to meet in 1988 would be the obvious and natural opportunity to express a collective Anglican view, and to initiate whatever decisions might then seem appropriate. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, has no settled procedure for taking a decision. The mysterious delays

mentioned above, as everybody knows, were due to theological reservations on the part of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. They finally consented to the publication of the Report but immediately released the text of a letter from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the new head of the Holy Office) to Bishop Alan Clark, the co-chairman of ARCIC and leader of the Catholic team. Every word in this letter will have been carefully weighed and the text therefore deserves close attention.<sup>2</sup>

In the first place, so Cardinal Ratzinger's letter says, the Holy Office – “at the request of the Holy Father” (who is not otherwise mentioned) – has “studied” the ARCIC Final Report (in other words, the text has had a very thorough going-over by the very capable, very conservative and instinctively ultramontane theologians of the papal Curia). The Final Report, then, in the judgment of the Holy Office, “is an *important* ecumenical event which constitutes a *significant* step towards reconciliation between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church” (my italics). There is already an observable tendency among Roman Catholics who hate the very thought of unity with Anglicans to dismiss the ARCIC Report as “only a report”. But, as Ratzinger's letter goes on to spell out reservations about the doctrine in the Report, one must remember that, for an institution that never hands out empty compliments, these measured words of initial commendation are pretty remarkable. Against the background of the history of the Holy Office one might be tempted to say that the failure to reject the ARCIC Report root and branch is already a degree of endorsement. At any rate, we can surely suppose that, in the judgment of the Holy Office, the Report is more right than wrong.

Then come the reservations. The Holy Office view, so we are told, is that “it is not yet possible to say that an agreement which is truly ‘substantial’ has been reached on the totality of the questions studied by the commission” (namely, ARCIC). Four reservations are listed. As the Report itself admits, “several points held as dogmas by the Catholic Church” are accepted at best only in part by Anglicans. Secondly, “some formulations” in the Report “can still give rise to divergent interpretations”. Thirdly, certain other formulations in the Report “do not seem able to be easily reconciled with Catholic doctrine”. Fourthly, while noting that ARCIC faithfully stuck to its agenda of seeking agreement on the three controversial topics of eucharist, ministry, and authority, “one should note that other questions must be examined as well, together and in the same spirit, in order to arrive at a definitive agreement capable of guaranteeing true reconciliation”. But for all these reservations, which certainly sound serious, the ARCIC Report is

now to be the basis of a consultation of all the bishops throughout the Roman Catholic Church – the Holy Office “will send detailed observations about the ARCIC Final Report to all of the episcopal conferences, as its contribution to the continuation of this dialogue”. Thus, perhaps, we may guess how Rome is going to proceed (playing it by ear). It is already remarkable that the Holy Office should be so fully and generously engaged in the ecumenical process. What is most noteworthy of all, however, is that the episcopal conferences of the Catholic Church are going to have to articulate their understanding of the eucharist, the ministry, and above all of papal authority, for the first time since Vatican II, and in a sense for the first time since the Council of Trent – and they will be doing so in response to the ARCIC Report. Whatever correction, clarification and amplification the Report may thus in due course receive, the Holy Office’s reception of ARCIC’s work has already demonstrated that it is not “just a report”.

How Anglicans will respond to the Final Report it is not for us to speculate. It is perhaps worth saying once again that there is no sense in contrasting solid Catholic doctrine as officially taught with soggy Anglican theology or unorthodox personal opinions: “We know what *we* believe – you can never tell what *Anglicans* believe”, etc. Obviously Anglican doctrine has to be judged where it is most responsibly and characteristically held and taught. Roman Catholics have to remember that we too harbour much nuttiness and that we too suffer from the gap between what many actually believe and what all are officially supposed to believe. There are many dioceses in communion with Rome where authentic Catholic doctrine is not exactly flourishing in the minds and hearts of the faithful – for that matter, how sound is the doctrine of the majority of the faithful in the diocese of Rome itself?

The Final Report reprints the three “Agreed Statements” – namely, on the eucharist (Windsor 1971), ministry and ordination (Canterbury 1973), and authority in the Church (Venice 1976), together with the replies to criticism of the first two of these (published in 1979). All of that material deserves further close study, and will certainly occasion some of the questions on the forthcoming Holy Office list. But the chief interest at the moment must obviously concentrate on the newly published material. This is almost entirely in response to criticism of the Venice Statement.<sup>3</sup>

The Venice Statement (paragraph 24) left open four problems which now, after five years of further study, ARCIC has felt able to attempt to resolve. Firstly, they had not been able to say much about the New Testament accounts of the position of St Peter

among the apostles, and thus they had left in obscurity the *background* which provides, for Catholics, the *analogy* for the position of the bishop of Rome among his fellow bishops. This background has now been sketched in, in a manner which should not make Catholic hackles rise. Secondly, Vatican I committed Catholics to holding that papal primacy is a matter of “divine right” – a subject on which an important book has recently been written by J Michael Miller.<sup>4</sup> There cannot be much doubt that most of the bishops in 1870 thought that papal primacy was set up by Jesus, a few weeks before his death, in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16). Accordingly, to say that papal primacy was a matter of “divine right” was to say that it had thus been instituted by Jesus himself – as opposed to the view that it only “emerged” at some point in the history of the early Church. The Vatican I text in fact asserts that papal primacy derives from Christ – “ex ipsius Christi Domini institutione seu jure divino” (*Pastor Aeternus*, chapter 2). It doesn’t seem to be cheating, or anyway it is not out of tune with the usual style of “developing” such texts, to argue that it was Christ precisely *as Lord* (hence, explicitly, after the Resurrection) from whom the ministry, not to speak of the Church, and so certainly the papacy, derived its institutional structure. In fact, then, as ARCIC says (p 87), “it is reasonable to ask whether a gap really exists between the assertion of a primacy by divine right (*jure divino*) and the acknowledgment of its emergence by divine providence (*divina providentia*)”. On this second point ARCIC is again surely pointing in a direction which Catholics can follow in good conscience.

The remaining two problems – papal jurisdiction and papal infallibility – heavily loaded with ultramontane ecclesiological cargo as they are – deserve more extended treatment.

Every bishop has authority in his diocese; that is what jurisdiction means: “It is not the arbitrary power of one man over the freedom of others, but a necessity if the bishop is to serve his flock as its shepherd” (p 89). Yes – but the negatives, here as elsewhere, are very revealing. Time and again people do in fact need to be reassured that episcopal authority need not mean arbitrary power. ARCIC, at any rate, consciously or otherwise, assumes that people’s expectations and experience of bishops are somewhat negative. In this respect, of course, the Report is entirely consistent with the New Testament – “For a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain” (Titus 1:7), not to mention the words ascribed to Jesus himself: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them ... It shall not be so among you” (Matthew

20: 25 f). Nobody can say a word against bishop or pope nowadays without being accused of “disloyalty” or “contestation”. But there is plainly a long Catholic tradition, with indisputable roots in Scripture, for being vigilant against abuses of episcopal authority.

So, as well as having jurisdiction in his own diocese, like every other bishop, the bishop of Rome, as the universal primate, has an extra layer of authority so that he can exercise “the jurisdiction necessary for the fulfilment of his functions, the chief of which is to serve the faith and unity of the whole Church” (p 89). Once again, however, we need to be reassured: “Primacy is not an autocratic power over the Church but a service in and to the Church which is a communion in faith and charity of local churches” (p 90). Here, as throughout the ARCIC texts, we are encouraged to rediscover the Catholic Church as a communion of local churches (dioceses), all of which are united in and through their common reference to the Apostolic See. The Catholic Church is not like the General Post Office, with headquarters in the metropolis and branch offices throughout the land. The bishop of a diocese is not the pope’s vicar — “the universal primate is not the source from which diocesan bishops derive their authority” (p 90). The ultramontane ecclesiology, with the pope as the absolute monarch, was clearly rejected some twenty years ago, in the Vatican II texts. But the doctrine of the Catholic Church as a communion of local churches has not taken root in the experience of most Catholics, any more than the doctrine of episcopal collegiality. The personal dominance of Pope John Paul II, even without his apparent intolerance of diversity, simply reaffirms the monolithic Church of the Pian era. The railways brought the pilgrims *en masse* and the immense physical charm of Pope Pius IX together with the martyr’s aura of the loss of the Papal States consolidated the modern papal image. Now, with television and the new papal triumphs, the juggernaut of neo-ultramontanism is unstoppable: with the “Pope-mobile” who needs the *sedes gestatoria*? More than ever before the bishop of Rome dwarfs his fellow bishops; without his ever intending to do so (indeed, no doubt, altogether against his will), the media presentation of the pope now ensures the survival of the notion that there is only one real bishop in the Catholic Church and that is the bishop of Rome.

The great problem is, as it always has been, the *practice* of papal jurisdiction, and the overwhelming drive towards uniformity and centralization. “Anglicans are entitled to assurance”, so the Report says (p 91), “that acknowledgment of the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome would not involve the suppression of theological, liturgical and other traditions which they value or the

imposition of wholly alien traditions". Once again the text reveals the deep fears that people have of the kind of demands that Rome might make. Cardinal Hume, according to reports in the newspapers, felt "ashamed" at having to tell the Pope about Protestant opposition to his visit to Britain. Shame is a feeling that comes from consciousness of (usually one's own) guilt or shortcoming. It sounded as though Cardinal Hume was patriotically ashamed. It may be hoped, however, that he felt ashamed rather than the shortcomings of the Catholic Church still make a substantial minority of our fellow citizens suspicious of papal intentions. In fact you don't have to be a follower of Ian Paisley or Pastor Jack Glass to feel that the Pope has a long way to go yet before ancestral suspicions are dissipated. If the papal visit were to bring out anti-Roman prejudices that would only help to clear the air. It is little more than twenty years since the Anglicans were regarded with ridicule and contempt. Nobody then could have imagined that the Pope would ever be received in the cathedral at Canterbury. For that matter, Anglican orders are still supposed to be invalid. Are we to suppose (as we should have done twenty years ago) that, when the Pope meets Dr Runcie at the door of his cathedral he will be greeting a *layman*, who is (no doubt innocently) misguided in thinking of himself as the successor of St Augustine of Canterbury? ARCIC's Final Report concludes with these words: "There are high expectations that significant initiatives will be boldly undertaken to deepen our reconciliation and lead us forward in the quest for the full communion to which we have been committed, in obedience to God, from the beginning of our dialogue" (p 99 f).

The fourth and final problem discussed is, of course, that of "infallibility". ARCIC accords infallibility twice as much space as they give to jurisdiction. This is as one would expect. Infallibility is the shibboleth. In fact, however, as the ARCIC discussion immediately proves once again, infallibility is an extremely abstract and theoretical topic. What actually matters, in the day to day life of the Catholic Church, is papal *jurisdiction*. The real stumbling block on the path to reconciliation between the Anglican Communion and Rome is papal *jurisdiction*. But papal *infallibility*, for whatever reason, is what people prefer to talk about. *That* is thought by Protestants to be the great stumbling block; *that* is supposed by many Catholics to be the unique treasure that we have to offer. Over the last thirty years at least, when the catalogue of historical instances of the actual exercise of papal infallibility was gradually whittled down to the two Marian dogmas, it has become increasingly difficult to see what real difference papal infallibility makes

to anything. What difference would there be if papal infallibility never existed?

One of the great differences between the Continental style of doing philosophy and the analytical way is that, in the latter, argument usually includes offering *examples*. Sooner or later you have to descend from the metaphysical clouds and provide instances of what you think the argument is actually about. By comparison, a great deal of theological discussion floats in a glassy sea of abstraction; it is often uncertain if the movement of the dialectic is anchored in any solid and specifiable reality. The terms become so rarefied, and the qualifications so convoluted, that the allegedly vital differences on which the adversaries continue so passionately to insist become as elusive as the proverbial mirage. Papal infallibility certainly is one of these topics which are regarded on all sides as of decisive importance – but nobody seems able to say, in any positive and unproblematic fashion, how its importance shows up in practice.

Some very wild notions of papal infallibility were current in 1866, as one can easily see from Newman's notes.<sup>5</sup> There were very prolific and influential Catholic theologians who could publish the thought that "God, by the mouth of the Supreme Pontiff when he teaches *ex cathedra*, makes a sort of new revelation". That assertion comes from the works of the famous Italian theologian Muzzarelli (1749 – 1813): made theologian of the Grand Penitentiary by Pope Pius VII he was also deported to France in 1807 by Napoleon, but he continued to write. His books, mostly written in Italian but translated into Latin and French, continued to go into new editions as late as 1859. Newman cites Muzzarelli along with such names as Bellarmine and Suarez. Of course very few theologians nowadays have ever dipped into the works of *these* great figures, let alone into the works of Muzzarelli. But when the Vatican Council in 1870 decreed that God does *not* "make known new doctrine" by the mouth of the pope (*Pastor Aeternus*, chapter 4) this was no superfluous or ornamental rhetoric, nor was it aimed at quelling Protestant qualms. The Council was disowning and excluding claims for the nature of papal infallibility which greatly respected and very influential *Catholic* (in this case ultramontane) theologians had made – *theologians*, not journalists, devotional writers and the like. What Newman thought in 1866 was of no account; what could be said with Muzzarelli's authority was another matter altogether.

It was not even clear in 1866 that papal infallibility must be limited to the deposit of faith. Newman, anyway, understood Muzzarelli as follows: “the Pope, who can speak when and how he will, is infallible in a province utterly distinct from the depositum, and related to it in no other way than Plato’s philosophy may subserve the Mosaic revelation, the two coming from two distinct sources respectively” (p 106). On that point also the text of the Council clearly limits the scope of papal authority, But the most important controversy settled in 1870 was over the “seat” of infallibility – in effect, is the Church kept in the truth by papal infallibility, or does the pope exercise “that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed” (the sense in which the Council determined the matter).

The problem remained, however, of finding agreed examples of papal infallibility in operation. In 1866, and for nearly a hundred years thereafter, it was not difficult to find theologians who could find signs of papal infallibility in papal encyclicals – “the authoritative tone and wording”, as Newman says (p 118), allegedly “showed that they were infallible enunciations”. As he goes on to say: “strong expressions used of or by a Bishop do not prove him infallible, neither do the like expressions used of or by a Pope”. But a serious question remained: “what is the use of the Pope having an infallible judgment in his Briefs”?

The impression left in 1870, as we have argued already in these pages (*New Blackfriars*, September 1979), is that the sort of situations in which a papal intervention involving infallibility might be demanded would be such controversies as gravely threatened the unity of the Church and the purity of the Catholic faith. In the words of the late Canon Garrett Sweeney (*Clergy Review*, October 1971), papal definitions “belong only to times when the Church is sick, and torn by dissensions that cannot be cured by discussion and agreement. The Petrine prerogative is not a glory of the Church; it is a disagreeable necessity, like the skill of the surgeon”. That still seems an acceptable position to me. When all else fails, and schism and heresy overwhelm us, appeal might have to be made to the Petrine promises. But the position seems to contain some obvious difficulties. For one thing, the only papal definition that there has been since 1870 (that of the Assumption of Our Lady) hardly meets that criterion. On the other hand, the history of papal interventions at moments of grave doctrinal crisis hardly confirms that resort to the Petrine promises would be much use. Whatever claims are to be made about a special charism that guards the judgment of the universal primate they have to be compatible with the brute



historical fact that the successors of Peter took an amazingly long time to understand the gravity of the Lutheran crisis. In the days (not so long ago) when the bull *Exsurge Domine* issued by Pope Leo X in 1520 was thought to be just such an infallible pronouncement it was a good deal easier to explain the papal function.

But perhaps practice is the best interpreter of doctrine. The proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption came after a lengthy and thorough process of consultation. In fact we now emphasize that the Marian dogma of 1854 was also the result of ascertaining what the mind of the Church on the subject was at the time. In practice, then, it looks as if the sort of papal definitions that might be said to involve infallibility issue as the expression of the already commonly held faith of the Catholic Church. The two more recent Marian dogmas (one might say) only enunciate what long-standing liturgical practice celebrated. In the words of Yarnold and Chadwick, the popes were seeking, in these two dogmas, “to articulate with theological precision the instinctive devotion of the faithful at the request of the faithful”.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the sort of definitions which involve papal infallibility are expressions, after consultation, of what Catholics already believe. This is the line that Karl Rahner has been taking for many years past; coming at the question from an entirely different angle the same line is followed by Peter Chirico, in what is plainly one of the most influential current discussions of the matter.<sup>7</sup> O Muzzarelli, O Chirico!

To return to ARCIC. According to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (Article 20): “The Church hath ... authority in Controversies of Faith”. As the Final Report puts it (p 93): “When matters of faith are at stake decisions may be made by the Church in universal councils; we are agreed that these are authoritative”. Furthermore: “We have also recognized the need in a united Church for a universal primate who ... can speak with authority in the name of the Church”. The implication follows: “Through both these agencies the Church can make a decisive judgment in matters of faith, and so exclude error”. We are not offered any examples at this point. Over the page, after some good paragraphs on such judgments – “These statements would be intended to articulate, elucidate or define matters of faith which the community believes at least implicitly” – we meet the following qualification (p 94): “Neither general councils nor universal primates are invariably preserved from error even in official declarations”. Here too the Thirty-nine Articles might have been appropriately cited (Article 21): “General Councils ... forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and word of

God ... may err and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God". Such truths were of course obvious in the Middle Ages. In practice, no doubt, Catholics know perfectly well that councils and popes can be wrong. But very little Catholic theology on the subject of papal infallibility allows for the dimension of sinful history that affects any human formulation of the truth.

Two further points may be noted. In characteristically arcane ARCIC prose this first point is made (p 96): "Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgment necessarily attached to the office of the bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be known to be wholly assured *before their reception by the faithful*" (my italics). Weigh every word of that pronouncement! One of the most important questions for Catholics now is to come to terms with the place of "reception" of conciliar or papal teaching by the faithful at large. Anglicans are certainly not committed to the proposition that it is how people take a doctrine that first imparts authority to it. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, need to recognize that the response that doctrine draws from the faithful says a good deal about its truth, as well as about their obedience. But finally ARCIC prefers to consign the term "infallibility" to a footnote (p 97): "This is a term applicable unconditionally only to God ... to use it of a human being, even in highly restricted circumstances, can produce many misunderstandings". There must be some other way of stating how the Church is maintained in the truth.

With Cardinal Ratzinger's letter ARCIC's Final Report challenges all of us who are in communion with Rome to re-examine our understanding of eucharistic doctrine, ministry and ordination, and authority in the Church. We should not be too sure that we know what we think.

1 ARCIC: THE FINAL REPORT. CTS/SPCK 1982. pp 122 £1.95

2 The text appeared in *The Times*, 31 March 1982

3 Cf *New Blackfriars*, April 1977: "The Venice Statement: Disestablishing a Church and Reforming the Papacy?"

4 THE DIVINE RIGHT OF THE PAPACY IN RECENT ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY by J Michael Miller (Analecta Gregoriana vol 218) Roma, 1980

5 THE THEOLOGICAL PAPERS OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN edited by J Derek Holmes. Oxford, 1979

6 TRUTH AND AUTHORITY by E J Yarnold SJ and Henry Chadwick. CTS/SPCK, 1977

7 For Rahner see *Theological Investigations XIV*; for Peter Chirico see *Infallibility: The Crossroads of Doctrine*, 1977