

The Letter of Cardinal Ratzinger to Bishop Alan C. Clark of East Anglia

My Lord Bishop,

After twelve years of work together, the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), composed of bishops and theologians appointed by both Communions, sent to their respective authorities a Final Report which sets forth the results obtained, through their theological research and continued prayer, on the important questions of Eucharistic doctrine, ministry and ordination, and authority in the Church.

At the request of the Holy Father, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has studied the ARCIC Final Report, and believes that it is an important ecumenical event which constitutes a significant step towards reconciliation between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church.

In the same spirit of sincerity that marks the work of ARCIC, and with the desire to contribute to that clarity so indispensable for genuine dialogue, the Congregation must also express its view 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.

In effect, as the Report itself indicates, there are several points, held as dogmas by the Catholic Church, which are not able to be accepted as such, or are able to be accepted only in part, by our Anglican brethren. Furthermore, some formulations in the ARCIC Report can still give rise to divergent interpretations, while others do not seem able to be easily reconciled with Catholic doctrine. Finally, while recognizing that the mixed Commission was legitimately limited to essential questions which have been the focus of serious differences between our two Communions in the past, 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.

This is why, in the judgment of our Congregation, everything should be done to ensure that the dialogue so happily undertaken continue, that there be further study, especially of the points where the results obtained thus far require it, and that this study be extended to other questions indispensable for the restoration of the ecclesial unity willed by our Lord.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, therefore, will send detailed observations about the ARCIC Final Report to all of the Episcopal Conferences, as its contribution to the continuation of this dialogue.

United with you in prayer that the Holy Spirit may inspire and guide our common efforts so that "they all may be perfectly one" (Jn 17:21 and 23), I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

JOSEPH Card. RATZINGER

27 March 1982

I. OBSERVATIONS OF THE FINAL REPORT OF ARCIC

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith March 29, 1982

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The Co-Chairmen of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) sent to His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, the Final Report of twelve years of the Commission's work on the questions of Eucharistic doctrine, ministry and ordination, and authority in the Church. At the request of the Holy Father, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has proceeded with a doctrinal examination of this Report, and its conclusions are set forth in the following observations.

A. Overall Evaluation

1) The Congregation must first of all give full recognition to the positive aspects of the work accomplished by ARCIC in the course of twelve years of an ecumenical dialogue which is exemplary on several counts. Setting aside a sterile polemical mentality, the partners have engaged in a patient and exacting dialogue in order to overcome doctrinal difficulties which were frankly acknowledged, with a view to restoring full communion between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. This work achieved in common is a singular event in the history of the relations between the two Communions, and is at the same time a notable effort towards reconciliation. Worthy of particular note are:

i) the quality of the doctrinal rapprochement achieved, in a serious attempt at a converging interpretation of the values considered fundamental by both sides;

ii) the fact that ARCIC has been attentive to a certain number of observations which the SCDF had previously made about the Windsor, Canterbury, and Venice statements, and has made an effort to respond satisfactorily in two series of elucidations on Eucharistic Doctrine — Ministry and Ordination (1979) and on Authority in the Church (1981).

2) The Congregation is obliged nevertheless to point out some negative aspects with regard to the method followed by ARCIC:

i) The first may be considered a minor point, although it is not without relevance for the document's readers: ARCIC has thought it unnecessary to revise the original statements; rather, it has left their adjustment to two series of elucidations. The result is a lack of harmony and homogeneity which could lead to different readings and to an unwarranted use of the Commission's texts.

The following aspects are more important, for even though they pertain to the method employed, they are not without doctrinal significance:

ii) The ambiguity of the phrase "substantial agreement."

The English adjective could be taken to indicate nothing other than "real" or "genuine." But its translation, at least into languages of Latin origin, as "substantial," "sostanziale" — above all with the connotation of the word in Catholic theology — leads one to read into it a fundamental agreement about points which are truly essential (and one will see below that the SCDF has justified reservations in this regard).

Another source of ambiguity lies in the following fact: a comparison of three texts (Elucidations, Salisbury [1979], nos. 2 and 9; Authority in the Church I, Venice [1976], no. 26) shows that the agreement spoken of as "substantial," while considered by ARCIC to be very

extensive, is not yet complete. This does not permit one to know whether, in the eyes of the members of ARCIC, the differences which remain or the things which are missing from the document only deal with secondary points (for example, the structure of liturgical rites, theological opinion, ecclesiastical discipline, spirituality), or whether these are points which truly pertain to the faith. Whatever the case, the Congregation is obliged to observe that sometimes it is the second hypothesis which is verified (for example, Eucharistic adoration, papal primacy, the Marian dogmas), and that it would not be possible here to appeal to the "hierarchy of truths" of which no. 11 of the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* of Vatican II speaks (cf. the Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* no. 4 par. 3).

iii) The possibility of a twofold interpretation of the texts.

Certain formulations in the Report are not sufficiently explicit and hence can lend themselves to a twofold interpretation, in which both parties can find unchanged the expression of their own position.

This possibility of contrasting and ultimately incompatible readings of formulations which are apparently satisfactory to both sides gives rise to a question about the real consensus of the two Communion, pastors and faithful alike. In effect, if a formulation which has received the agreement of the experts can be diversely interpreted, how could it serve as a basis for reconciliation on the level of church life and practice?

Moreover, when the members of ARCIC speak about "the consensus we have reached" (cf. *Eucharistic Doctrine*, Windsor [1971], no. 1), one does not always see clearly whether this means the faith really professed by the two Communion in dialogue, or a conviction which the members of the Commission have reached and to which they want to bring their respective coreligionists.

In this regard it would have been useful — in order to evaluate the exact meaning of certain points of agreement — had ARCIC indicated their position in reference to the documents which have contributed significantly to the formation of the Anglican identity (*The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, *Book of Common Prayer*, *Ordinal*), in those cases where the assertions of the Final Report seem incompatible with these documents. The failure to take a stand on these texts can give rise to uncertainty about the exact meaning of the agreements reached.

The Congregation finally as to note that, from the Catholic point of view, there remain in the ARCIC Final Report a certain number of difficulties at the level of doctrinal formulations, some of which touch the very substance of the faith. These difficulties — their description and the reasons for them — will now be listed following the order of the new texts of the Final Report (*Eucharistic Doctrine — Ministry and Ordination: Elucidations* [Salisbury, 1979]; *Authority in the Church II; Authority in the Church: an Elucidation* [Windsor, 1981]).

B. Doctrinal Difficulties noted by the SCDF

I—Eucharist (cf. *Elucidations*, Salisbury, 1979)

1) Eucharist as Sacrifice

In the *Elucidations*, no. 5, ARCIC has explained the reason for its use of the term *anamnesis* and has recognized as legitimate the specification of *anamnesis* as sacrifice, in reference to the Tradition of the Church and her liturgy. Nevertheless, in so far as this has been the object of controversy in the past, one cannot be satisfied with an explanation open to a reading which does not include an essential aspect of the mystery.

This text says, as does the Windsor statement (no. 5), "the Church enters into the movement of (Christ's) self-offering" and the Eucharistic memorial, which consists in "the making effective in the present of an event in the past," is "the Church's effectual proclamation of God's mighty acts." But one still asks oneself what is really meant by the words "the Church enters into the movement of (Christ's) self-offering" and "the making effective in the present of an event in the past." It would have been helpful, in order to permit Catholics to see their faith fully expressed on this point, to make clear that this real presence of the sacrifice of Christ, accomplished by the sacramental words, that is to say, by the ministry of the priest saying "in persona Christi" the words of the Lord, includes a participation of the Church, the Body of Christ, in the sacrificial act of her Lord, so that she offers sacramentally in him and with him his sacrifice. Moreover, the propitiatory value that Catholic dogma attributes to the Eucharist, which is not mentioned by ARCIC, is precisely that of this sacramental offering (cf. Council of Trent, DS 1743, 1753; John Paul II, *Letter Dominicae Coenae*, no. 8, par. 4).

2) Real Presence

One notes with satisfaction that several formulations clearly affirm the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament: for example, "Before the Eucharistic Prayer, to the question: 'What is that?', the believer answers: 'It is bread.' After the Eucharistic Prayer to the same question he answers: 'It is truly the body of Christ, the Bread of Life'" (Salisbury Elucidations, no. 6; cf. also Windsor Statement, nos. 6 and 10).

Certain other formulations, however, especially some of those which attempt to express the realization of this presence, do not seem to indicate adequately what the Church understands by "transsubstantiation" ("the wonderful and unique change of the whole substance of the bread into his body and of the whole substance of the wine into his blood, while only the species of bread and wine remain" — Council of Trent, DS 1652; cf. Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, AAS LVII [1965], p. 766).

It is true that the Windsor statement says in a footnote that this must be seen as "a mysterious and radical change" effected by "a change in the inner reality of the elements." But this same statement speaks in another place (no. 3) of a "sacramental presence through bread and wine" so that they become the food of the new creation." One also finds the expression: "the association of Christ's presence with the consecrated elements" (no. 7) and "the association of Christ's sacramental presence with the consecrated bread and wine" (no. 9). These formulations can be read with the understanding that, after the Eucharistic prayer, the bread and wine remain such in their ontological substance, even while becoming the sacramental mediation of the body and blood of Christ. (1) In the light of these observations, therefore, it seems necessary to say that the substantial agreement which ARCIC so carefully intended to present should receive even further clarification.

3) Reservation and Adoration of the Eucharist

Elucidations (no. 9) admits the possibility of a divergence not only in the practice of adoration of Christ in the reserved sacrament but also in the "theological judgements" relating to it. But the adoration rendered to the Blessed Sacrament is the object of a dogmatic definition in the Catholic Church (cf. Council of Trent, DS 1643, 1656). A question could arise here about the current status in the Anglican Communion of the regulation called the "Black Rubric" of the *Book of Common Prayer*: "... the Sacramental Bread and Wine remain still in their natural substances and therefore may not be adored."

II—Ministry and Ordination (cf. Elucidations, Salisbury, 1979)

1) Ministerial Priesthood

Elucidations (no. 12) makes the distinction between the common priesthood of the people of God and the priesthood of the ordained ministry, and makes clear what the priest alone is able to do in the eucharistic action in the following manner: "it is only the ordained minister who presides at the eucharist, in which, in the name of Christ and on behalf of his Church, he recites the narrative of the institution of the Last Supper, and invokes the Holy Spirit upon the gifts." But this formulation only means that he is a priest, in the sense of Catholic doctrine, if one understands that through him the Church offers sacramentally the sacrifice of Christ. Moreover, it has been previously observed that the document does not explicitate such a sacramental offering. Because the priestly nature of the ordained minister depends upon the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, lack of clarity on the latter point would render uncertain any real agreement on the former (cf. Council of Trent, DS 1740-1741, 1752, 1764, 1771; John Paul II, Letter *Dominicae Coenae*, no. 8, par. 4 and no. 9, par. 2).

2) Sacramentality and Ordination

ARCIC affirms the sacramental nature of the rite of ordination (no. 13), and further says that "Those who are ordained... receive their ministry from Christ through those designated in the Church to hand it on." Nevertheless, it does not state clearly enough that it is a tenet of the Church's faith — the possible difficulties of an historical proof notwithstanding — that the sacrament of Holy Orders was instituted by Christ: in effect, note 4 of the Canterbury Statement, which refers to the "The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion" (art. 25), allows one to infer that Anglicans recognize this institution only for the two "sacraments of the Gospel," that is, Baptism and Eucharist.

It may be noted here that the question bearing on the institution of the sacraments and on

the way in which this can be known is intimately linked to the question of the interpretation of Holy Scripture. The fact of institution cannot be considered only within the limits of the certitude arrived at by the historical method; one must take into account the authentic interpretation of the Scriptures which it pertains to the Church to make.

3) Ordination of Women

As ARCIC has noted, since the 1973 Canterbury Statement there have been developments with regard to the ordination of women (cf. *Elucidations*, no. 15). The new canonical regulations which have recently been introduced on this point in some parts of the Anglican Communion, and about which she has been able to speak of a "slow but steady growth of a consensus of opinion" (cf. Letter of Dr. Coggan to Paul VI, 9 July 1975), are formally opposed to the "common traditions" of the two Communions. Furthermore, the obstacle thus created is of a doctrinal character, since the question whether one can or cannot be ordained is linked to the nature of the sacrament of Holy Orders. (2)

III—Authority in the Church (Statement II, and an Elucidation, Windsor, 1981)

1) Interpretation of the Petrine Text of the New Testament

It is necessary to underline the importance of the fact that Anglicans recognize that "a primacy of the Bishop of Rome is not contrary to the New Testament, and is part of God's purpose regarding the Church's unity and catholicity" (Authority II, no. 7).

Just as for the institution of the sacraments, however, one should keep in mind that it is not possible for the Church to adopt as the effective norm for reading the Scriptures only what historical criticism maintains, thus allowing the homogeneity of the developments which appear in Tradition to remain in doubt.

From the point of view, that ARCIC writes about the role of Peter ("a special position among the Twelve", no. 3; "a position of special importance", no. 5) does not measure up to the truth of faith as this has been understood by the Catholic Church, on the basis of the principal Petrine texts of the New Testament (Jn 1:42; 21:15; Mt 16:16— cf. DS 3053), and does not satisfy the requirements of the dogmatic statement of Vatican Council I: "the apostle Peter . . . received immediately and directly from Jesus Christ our Lord a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction (Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, chap. 1, DS 3055).

2) The Primacy and Jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome

In commenting on the "ius divinum" used by Vatican Council I in reference to the primacy of the Pope, the successor of Peter, ARCIC says that "it means at least that this primacy expresses God's purpose for his Church", and that it "need not to be taken to imply that the universal primacy as a permanent institution was directly founded by Jesus during his life on earth" (Authority II, no. 11). In so doing, ARCIC does not respect the exigencies of the word "institution" in the expression of Vatican Council I "by the institution of Christ our Lord himself" (Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* chap. 2, DS 3058), which require that Christ himself provided for the universal primacy.

In this perspective, one should note that ARCIC is not exact in interpreting Vatican Council II when it says that the "Council allows it to be said that a church out of communion with the Roman See might lack nothing from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church except that it does not belong to the visible manifestation of full Christian communion which is maintained in the Roman Catholic Church" (no. 12). According to Catholic tradition, visible unity is not something extrinsic added to the particular churches, which already would possess and realize in themselves the full essence of the Church; this unity pertains to the intimate structure of faith, permeating all its elements. For this reason the office of conserving, fostering and expressing this unity in accord with the Lord's will is a constitutive part of the very nature of the Church (cf. Jn 21:15-19). The power of jurisdiction over all the particular churches, therefore, is intrinsic (i.e. "iure divino") to this office, not something which belongs to it for human reasons nor in order to respond to historical needs. The Pope's "full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered" (Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 22; cf. DS 3064), which can take different forms according to historical exigencies, can never be lacking.

The ARCIC Report recognizes "that a universal primacy will be needed in a reunited Church"

(Authority II, no. 9) in order to safeguard unity among the particular churches, and that "in any future union a universal primacy . . . should be held" by the Bishop of Rome (cf. Authority I, no. 23). Such a recognition must be regarded as a significant fact in inter-church relations, but — as noted above — there remain important differences between Anglican and Catholics concerning the nature of this primacy.

3) Infallibility and Indefectibility

One must note first of all that the term indefectibility, which ARCIC uses, is not equivalent to the term retained by the First Vatican Council (cf. Authority in the Church I, no. 18).

For ARCIC, the assurance the faithful have of the truth of the teaching of the Church's magisterium, in the last analysis, lies in the fidelity to the Gospel they recognize in it rather than in the authority of the person who expresses it (cf. Authority II, no. 27; Elucidation, no. 3).

The Commission points out in particular a divergence between the two Communion on the following point: "In spite of our agreement over the need of a universal primacy in a united Church, Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgement 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" (Authority II, no. 31).

As the above references show, agreement between the Anglican understanding of infallibility and the faith professed by Catholics has not yet been reached. ARCIC rightly insists that "the Church's teaching is proclaimed because it is true; it is not true simply because it has been proclaimed" (Authority II, no. 27). The term "infallibility", however, refers immediately not to truth but to certitude: for it says that the certitude of the Church about the truth of the Gospel is present without any doubt in the testimony of the successor of St Peter when he exercises his office of "strengthening his brethren" (Lk 22:32; cf. Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 25; DS 3065, 3074).

4) General Councils

The Windsor Elucidation repeats something about which the SCDF has already presented a comment: "only those judgements of general councils are guaranteed to 'exclude what is erroneous' or are 'protected from error' which have as their content 'fundamental matters of faith' which 'formulate the central truths of salvation' . . ." (no. 3). It further accentuates the Venice statement by saying that far from implying that general councils cannot err, "the Commission . . . is well aware that they 'sometimes have erred' " (ibid.).

What is said here about general councils is not exact: the mission which the Church recognizes for the bishops united in council is not limited to "fundamental matters of faith"; it extends to the entire domain of faith and morals, where they are "teachers and judges" (cf. Vatican II, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 25). Moreover, the ARCIC text does not distinguish in the conciliar documents between what is truly defined and the other considerations which are found there.

5) "Reception"

Considering the case of a definition "ex cathedra" by the Bishop of Rome, the Report (Authority II, no. 29) points out a difference between Catholic doctrine and the Anglican position: "Roman Catholics conclude that the judgement is preserved from error and the proposition true. If the definition proposed for assent were not manifestly a legitimate interpretation of biblical faith and in line with orthodox tradition, Anglicans would think it is a duty to reserve the reception of the definition for study and discussion."

On the other hand, when ARCIC treats of conciliar definitions and their reception, it speaks as though it had truly arrived at a formula of agreement by avoiding two extremes (Elucidation, no. 3). But this formula makes reception by the faithful a factor which must contribute, under the heading of an "ultimate" or "final indication", to the recognition of the authority and value of the definition as a genuine expression of the faith (cf. also Authority II, no. 5).

It is this, according to the Report, the role of "reception", one must say that this theory is not in accord with Catholic teaching as expressed in the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican I, which says: "the divine Redeemer willed his Church to be endowed (with infallibility) in defining doctrine concerning faith and morals" (DS 3074), nor with the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II, according to which the bishops, assembled in ecumenical council, enjoy this infallibility, and their definitions call for the obedient assent of faith (cf. no. 25).

The Constitution *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II, no. 10, it is true, speaks of "a remarkable harmony" which is established "between the bishops and the faithful" in "maintaining, practising and professing the faith", but it also adds: "The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed."

C. Other Points in view of Future Dialogue

1) Apostolic Succession

This question has been at the centre of all ecumenical discussions and lies at the heart of the ecumenical problem; as a result it affects all of the questions treated by ARCIC: the reality of the Eucharist, the sacramentality of the priestly ministry, the nature of the Roman primacy.

The Final Report asserts a consensus on the point (cf. Canterbury Statement, no. 16), but we may ask whether the text itself provides a sufficient analysis of the question. This is a problem, then, which would deserve to be taken up again, studied more thoroughly, and above all confronted by the facts of church life and practice in the two Communions.

2) Moral Teaching

Quite properly, the dialogue conducted by ARCIC was focused on the three themes which have historically been the object of controversy between Catholics and Anglicans: "on the eucharist, on the meaning and function of ordained ministry, and on the nature and exercise of authority in the Church" (Introduction to the Final Report, no. 2).

But since the dialogue has as its final objective the restoration of church unity, it will necessarily have to be extended to all the points which constitute an obstacle to the restoration of that unity. Among these points it will be appropriate to give moral teaching an important place.

D. Final Remarks

1) On the agreement reached in the Final Report of ARCIC

At the conclusion of its doctrinal examination, the SCDF thinks that the Final Report, which represents a notable ecumenical endeavour and a useful basis for further steps on the road to reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, does not yet constitute a substantial and explicit agreement on some essential elements of Catholic faith:

a) because the Report explicitly recognizes that one or another Catholic dogma is not accepted by our Anglican brethren (for example, Eucharistic adoration, infallibility, the Marian dogmas);

b) because one or another Catholic doctrine is only accepted in part by our Anglican brethren (for example, the primacy of the Bishop of Rome)';

c) because certain formulations in the Report are not explicit enough to ensure that they exclude interpretations not in harmony with the Catholic faith (for example, that which concerns the Eucharist as sacrifice, the Real Presence, the nature of the priesthood);

d) because certain affirmations in the Report are inexact and not acceptable as Catholic doctrine (for example, the relationship between the primacy and the structure of the Church, the doctrine of "reception");

e) finally because some important aspects of the teaching of the Catholic Church have either not been dealt with or have been only in an indirect way (for example, apostolic succession, the "regula fidei", moral teaching).

2) On the next concrete step to be taken

The SCDF thinks that the results of its examination would recommend:

a) that the dialogue be continued, since there are sufficient grounds for thinking its continuation will be fruitful;

b) that it be deepened in regard to the points already addressed where the results are not satisfactory;

c) that it be extended to new themes, particularly those which are necessary with a view to the restoration of full church unity between the two Communions.

1) One may also recall in this regard the Anglican-Lutheran statement of 1972, which reads: "Both Communion affirm the real presence of Christ in this sacrament, but neither seeks to define precisely how this happens. In the eucharistic action (including consecration) and reception, the bread and wine, while remaining bread and wine, become the means whereby Christ is truly present and gives himself to the communicants." (Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Conversations 1970-1972, authorized by the Lambeth Conference and the Lutheran World Federation, in *Lutheran World*, vol. XIX, 1972, p. 393).

2) In the Declaration *Inter Insigniores* of 15 October 1976, one will find the reasons for which the Church does not consider herself authorized to admit women to ordination to the priesthood. It is not a question of socio-cultural reasons, but rather of the "unbroken tradition throughout the history of the Church, universal in the East and in the West", which must be "considered to conform to God's plan for his Church" (cf. nos. 1 and 4).