

Anglican-Orthodox and Anglican-Roman Catholic Theological Dialogue

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For more than thirty years the Anglican-Orthodox and Anglican-Roman Catholic international theological dialogues have worked to reconcile the Anglican Communion and the principal Churches of East and West, themselves engaged in theological dialogue with one another to overcome the ancient separation between Orthodox and Roman Catholics. Each of these two dialogues has its own distinctive characteristics. Their agendas have been determined by the specific theological differences which hinder mutual recognition and sacramental communion between the churches involved. Their discussions of theological issues have been conditioned by the historical relationship of the participating churches, by the circumstances of their separation and by the subsequent relations between them as distinct ecclesial communities. Of considerable importance too has been the composition of the commissions appointed to conduct the dialogues, the attitude of their members to one another and the personal relations which have developed among them as the dialogues have proceeded. In all these respects the international dialogues between Anglicans and Orthodox on the one hand and Anglicans and Roman Catholics on the other merit comparison; for there are similarities and contrasts, which are instructive for broader ecumenical discussions.

Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: the Background

The Church of England inherited the existing division between Eastern and Western Christianity. In the sixteenth century Anglicans and Orthodox were geographically separate. There were occasional contacts of a mostly personal character, although some took place with the blessing of hierarchs in both churches. Among them the foundation of a Greek College in Oxford at the end of the seventeenth century is of particular interest. Though its life was brief, it enabled a few Greek students to experience the Church of England at first hand, and to discern some of the differences between it and their own church. English chaplains in the Levant were also able to experience Orthodoxy for themselves, and several of them wrote books in which they recorded both what they saw and also their evaluation of a Christian tradition very different from their own. But theological discussion between Anglicans and Orthodox scarcely existed before the nineteenth century. That century saw increasing contacts, not least between the Church of England and the Orthodox Church in Russia. They were often, though not always, the product of individual initiatives. Relations between Anglicans and Orthodox were on the agenda of the third Lambeth Conference of 1888, which noted *inter alia* that closer relations between the two churches would not be possible so long as the Orthodox maintained the making and venerating of icons.¹

Theological dialogue between the two churches at an official level began only in the early twentieth century. After the First World War the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued an appeal for Christian unity² and the Church of England took steps to promote discussion with the Orthodox. Theological talks took place in the 1920s and 1930s. Unofficial contacts between Anglicans and Orthodox grew as a result of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, and the consequent emigration and expulsion of Russian Orthodox Christians from the Soviet state. Russian Orthodox and English Anglicans founded the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius in 1928, and it became a fruitful forum in which mutual knowledge could grow, and differing views be discussed.

After the Second World War theological discussion between the two churches was resumed. A theological conference was held in Moscow in 1958, at which Archbishop Michael Ramsey led the Anglican delegation. In the 1960s it was agreed that a formal theological dialogue should take place between all the Provinces of the Anglican Communion and all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Its aim was to resolve those issues which earlier discussions, both formal and informal, had shown to stand in the way of mutual recognition and sacramental communion. Each church appointed a body of theologians as its representatives. They met separately in the course of the 1960s and early 1970s to draw up an agenda.³ In 1973 the joint Commission met for the first time in

¹ Lambeth 1888 "Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Relation of the Anglican Communion to the Eastern Churches," in Randall T. DAVIDSON (ed.), *The Lambeth Conferences of 1867, 1878 and 1888* (London: SPCK, 1889), p.349.

² "Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1920" in Constantin G. PATELOS (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978), pp. 40-43.

³ See Colin DAVEY, "Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue 1920-1976," in Kallistos WARE and Colin DAVEY (eds.), *Anglican Orthodox Dialogue: The Moscow Agreed Statement* (London: SPCK, 1977), pp.4-36, especially pp.24 and following.

Oxford and began what was known as the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Discussions, A/OJDD for short.

The omens seemed favourable. There had never been any hostility between Anglicans and Orthodox. They had existed almost entirely in different geographical regions, and so there had been no possibility of rivalry between them and no opportunity for proselytising. Anglicans had no doubt the Orthodox Church was part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church affirmed as an article of faith in the Nicene Creed. They might think it in need of some reformation, but they had never questioned its Christian credentials. Such contacts as there had previously been had suggested that, although the two churches had very different histories and existed in different civil and religious cultures, they were not so dissimilar as to suggest fundamental problems in establishing close mutual relations. Both traditions relied as much on liturgical texts as on dogmatic definitions to express their doctrinal beliefs. Both had a similar structure, based on autocephalous, or independent, national churches whose unity was based on a shared doctrinal and liturgical tradition. Both emphasised the importance of the link between the Church and the nation-state to which its members belonged. For both, that unity had a personal focus in the Patriarch of Constantinople for the Orthodox, the Archbishop of Canterbury for Anglicans. Each of them was the primate of a local Orthodox church or Anglican province, each was acknowledged as *primus inter pares* by all other Orthodox or Anglican bishops, and each possessed considerable spiritual authority; but neither claimed jurisdiction over churches or provinces other than their own. Orthodox and Anglicans were at one in rejecting the concept and practice of universal primacy as it had developed in the Roman Catholic Church.

Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue: the Background

The historical background to the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, ARCIC, was very different. In the sixteenth century the Church of England, having been separated from Roman jurisdiction, had then undergone a doctrinal and liturgical reformation. There had been hostility between Protestants and Catholics in England, and for a time reciprocal persecution: each side had its martyrs. The Church of England's claim to be the catholic church in England, reformed but nevertheless in essential continuity with the church re-founded by St Augustine of Canterbury at the end of the sixth century, was rejected by Rome; and the Anglican claim to possess valid orders was denied by Leo XIII's Bull of 1896, which declared them 'totally null and utterly void.'⁴ That contrasted heavily with the conditional recognition of Anglican ordinations by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and some other Orthodox churches in the 1920s and 1930s.

The climate of relations between Roman Catholics and Anglicans changed in the 1960s. Pope John XXIII invited other churches to send observers to the Second Vatican Council. From the Anglican presence at the Council sprang the Anglican Centre in Rome. Archbishop Michael Ramsey's visit to Pope Paul VI in 1966 both symbolised and further

⁴ LEO XIII, "Apostolicae Curae" in R. William FRANKLIN (ed.), *Anglican Orders: Essays on the Centenary of Apostolicae Curae 1896-1996* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1996), pp. 127-137.

promoted a new era in relations between Canterbury and Rome.⁵ When the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission first met in 1970, it did so in a transformed ecumenical atmosphere. The Council had encouraged the Roman Catholic Church to engage positively in the movement for Christian unity, on the basis of its recognition of the validity of all baptisms performed with water in the name of the Trinity. A potential theological distinction was opened between the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of the creed and the Roman Catholic Church: the former was said to subsist in the latter.⁶ The precise significance of that phrase has been a matter for dispute. But the Council recognised the Orthodox churches as sister churches, and subsequently that phrase was occasionally used informally of the Anglican churches as well.⁷ That recognition of other churches as sister churches or as ecclesial communities came after centuries in which Rome had denied that any other Christian community, including the Orthodox, was within the one Church of Christ.

Pope John XXIII had been instrumental in dissolving that legacy of hostility. There may remain Roman Catholic traditionalists for whom the Anglican Church is still heretical and schismatic; there may be extreme evangelicals within the Anglican Communion for whom Roman Catholicism remains a corrupt misrepresentation of the gospel. But at all levels of both churches, in England and elsewhere, the decades since Vatican II have seen friendliness replacing suspicion and hostility. Practical co-operation in many ways has come to be regarded as normal. Roman Catholics and Anglicans live side-by-side in most parts of the world. In England bishops of both churches meet together, Roman Catholics participate in the work of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and there are some places where Anglican and Roman Catholic congregations share a church building and others where a school is run jointly by both.

Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue: ARCIC I

It was in this rapidly changing atmosphere that ARCIC I – as it should now be called – began its work. Its agenda, like that of A/OJDD, consisted of specific issues on which the two churches had traditionally disagreed. Some of these topics were common to both dialogues. Roman Catholics and Anglicans had disagreed about the doctrine of the Eucharist, of ordination, and of authority in the Church. These were also issues for Anglicans and Orthodox, since the Reformation had profoundly conditioned Anglican teaching and liturgical practice. ARCIC I made good progress.⁸ Its Final Report issued in 1981 registered significant agreement on these issues. It was able to do so in part because it had determined to go back beyond the controversies of the sixteenth century to an earlier tradition within which Anglicans and Roman Catholics might find common

⁵ See “The Common Declaration by Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, 24 March 1966,” in Joseph W. WITNER and J. Robert WRIGHT (eds.), *Called to Full Unity: Documents on Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations 1966-1983* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1986), pp. 3-4.

⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, § 8.

⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, § 14; see “Pope Paul VI: Remarks at the Canonization of Forty Martyrs, 25 October 1970,” where he refers to the Anglican Church as an “ever beloved sister” of the Roman Catholic Church, in WITNER-WRIGHT, *Called to Full Unity*, p.54.

⁸ Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), *The Final Report* (London: SPCK, 1982).

ground. Discussion was also helped by theological developments which had taken place in both churches. Behind much of the work of the Second Vatican Council lay the recovery of the eastern patristic tradition in the Roman Catholic Church; while within Anglicanism the catholic movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had significantly affected theological thought in circles broader than those of explicit Anglo-Catholicism. The influence of the movement for liturgical renewal and the parish communion movement had brought about widespread change in Anglican patterns of worship; and the renewal of Anglican liturgical forms implied a certain shift in theological attitudes inherited from the sixteenth century, themselves much conditioned by reaction against late medieval ideas and practices. A certain convergence could be perceived in the direction in which both Anglicans and Roman Catholics were moving. In the 1980s the English Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee, English ARC, studied the new Roman Catholic and Church of England ordinals, and concluded that the revised liturgical texts of both churches reflected the same understanding of ordained ministry.

ARCIC I reflected that convergence in its treatment of hitherto divisive topics. Its Final Report published in 1981 contained three statements on the specific areas of traditional disagreement identified by the Joint Preparatory Commission which met in Malta in 1968. The Windsor statement of 1971 on eucharistic doctrine registered broad agreement on the meaning of the mystery of the Eucharist in the life and mission of the Church. There was agreement too on the historically divisive issues of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the relation between the Eucharist and the sacrifice of Christ. Two years later the Canterbury statement expressed the consensus of the Commission on the essential aspects of belief regarding ministry and ordination. After a further three years the Commission published in 1976 the Venice agreed statement, recording a wide consensus on authority in the Church, while acknowledging that more work needed to be done on papal primacy.

The Final Report included Elucidations on all three statements, composed in the light of criticisms from opposite sides. Traditional Roman Catholics were disturbed by the absence of traditional catholic terminology, while Anglicans of an evangelical persuasion were disturbed by what they saw as departures from reformed doctrine as expressed in the Anglican Thirty Nine Articles of Religion. In particular they feared that insufficient attention had been paid to the primary authority of Scripture, and too much weight attached to tradition. The Commission had in fact deliberately set out not to emphasise the traditional differences between the two churches, but to find common ground on which both might agree.

That point was made forcefully in a paper given by Bishop Christopher Hill in 1996 at a conference to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Malines Conversations in the 1920s. Entitled 'ARCIC I and II: An Anglican Perspective'.⁹ Bishop Christopher quoted from an address to members of the Commission given by John Paul II in 1980. 'Your method', the pope said, 'has been to go behind the habit of thought and expression born

⁹ Christopher HILL, "ARCIC I and II: An Anglican Perspective," in Adalbert DENAUX and John A. DICK (eds.), *From Malines to ARCIC: The Malines Conversations Commemorated* (Leuven: Leuven University Press / Peeters, 1997), pp. 133-148)

and nourished in enmity and controversy, to scrutinize together the great common treasure, to clothe it in language at once traditional and expressive of an age which no longer glories in strife but seeks to come together in listening to the quiet voice of the Spirit.’ The Bishop, who had served ARCIC during the fifteen years he was the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, also emphasised the importance to ARCIC’s work of its stable membership. Over the years the Commission became ‘a stable and trusting group of Christian friends, dedicated to the restoration of communion.’ Bishop Christopher stressed too the importance of daily shared worship at the Commission’s meetings, which brought home to its members their high degree of spiritual communion alongside their inability to share fully in each other’s eucharistic celebrations.

Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: A/OJDD – the First Phase

ARCIC I had already produced its two agreed statements on eucharistic doctrine and ordination and ministry when A/OJDD began its work in 1973. The first phase of A/OJDD included a consideration of the Eucharist. ARCIC I had concentrated, though not exclusively, on the presence of Christ and the eucharistic sacrifice, topics at issue between the Roman Catholic Church and all the reformed churches since the C16th. A/OJDD had a particular concern, within a general consideration of eucharistic doctrine, for the question of the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the eucharistic prayer. The Moscow Agreed Statement of 1976 registered considerable agreement on this subject,¹⁰ and also dealt with a number of other basic theological issues. It included a section on the knowledge of God, referring to the Orthodox distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies, and to the concept of divinization, language unfamiliar to Anglicans – and for that matter to Roman Catholics – although the doctrines underlying such language were not, the statement said, rejected by Anglicans.¹¹ A/OJDD also discussed the inspiration and authority of scripture and the relationship between scripture and tradition. Both sides agreed that ‘Scripture is the main criterion whereby the Church tests traditions to determine whether they are part of Holy Tradition or not’ and ‘that Holy Tradition completes Holy Scripture in the sense that it safeguards the integrity of the biblical message’.¹² ARCIC I dealt with this question in its Elucidation to its third statement on authority in the Church of 1976.¹³

One of the outstanding issues in East-West Christian relations since the C9th has been the *filioque* clause in the creed approved by the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople of 381, commonly called the Nicene Creed. From the end of the sixth century the custom spread in Western Christianity of adding to its affirmation that the Holy Spirit proceeds ‘from the Father’ the words ‘and the Son’. Recognised by the papacy in the eleventh century, this form of the creed was inherited by the Church of

¹⁰ “The Moscow Agreed Statement,” in WARE-DAVEY, *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue*, pp. 82-91, especially section VII, nos. 29-32, pp. 90-91. Republished in *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Press, 1985), Appendix 1, pp.56-57. Subsequent page references for this document are from the original version.

¹¹ “The Moscow Agreed Statement,” Section 1, nos. 1-3. pp. 82-83

¹² “The Moscow Agreed Statement,” in WARE-DAVEY, *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue*, Section II, no. 9, p.94.

¹³ “Elucidation (1981),” in ARCIC, *The Final Report*, no 2, pp. 69-70

England from the medieval Western tradition. In 1976 the Anglican members of the Commission agreed that because it was not in the original form of the creed, because it was introduced unilaterally in the West, and because the creed is the public confession of faith by the People of God at the Eucharist, the Filioque clause should not be included in the creed. For the Orthodox this was a decision of considerable symbolic as well as of theological significance.¹⁴

Crisis for Dialogue: the Ordination of Women

A critical moment came for both ARCIC and A/OJDD when in the 1970s women began to be ordained to the presbyterate in some Anglican provinces. Both dialogues had begun with the presupposition that the goal towards which they were working was sacramental communion. For both, this development posed a new and serious obstacle to the reconciliation of Anglicans with their partners in dialogue. That was acknowledged in the 1979 Elucidation of ARCIC I's 1973 Canterbury statement on ministry and ordination.¹⁵ In 1977 the ordination of women threatened to bring A/OJDD to an end, when Orthodox members realised that Anglicans were not just discussing the matter, but had, in the Episcopal Church in the USA, already ordained a number of women. The Anglican Co-chairman, Bishop Robert Runcie, spent his sabbatical visiting autocephalous Orthodox Churches to persuade them to continue the dialogue. A special emergency meeting of the Commission took place in 1978 in Athens, at which the Orthodox maintained the matter could not even be discussed: it was simply out of the question for women to be ordained.¹⁶

Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: the Second Phase

Nevertheless, both dialogues continued. The Orthodox officially downgraded A/OJDD to an interesting exchange of theological views, which could not now lead to reconciliation and sacramental communion. Nevertheless, A/OJDD went on to discuss the mystery of the Church, faith in the Trinity, prayer and holiness, and worship and tradition. The fruits of its discussions were published in the Dublin Agreed Statement of 1984. Remarkable agreements were registered in the first section on the mystery of the Church, whose title was itself significant. There was much agreement on the nature of the Church, on the importance of the local church, and on the nature of wider leadership within the Church. Anglicans and Orthodox agreed in rejecting the Roman claim to universal jurisdiction and papal infallibility. There was agreement too on the witness and evangelism as aspects

¹⁴ "The Moscow Agreed Statement," nos. 19-21, pp. 87-88.

¹⁵ "Elucidation (1979)," in ARCIC, *The Final Report*, no. 5, p. 44: "Since the publication of the Statement [Ministry and Ordination] there have been rapid developments with regard to the ordination of women. In those churches of the Anglican Communion where canonical ordinations of women have taken place, the bishops concerned believe that their canonical actions implies no departure from the traditional doctrine of the ordained ministry (as expounded, for instance, in the Statement). While the Commission realizes that the ordination of women has created for the Roman Catholic Church a new and grave obstacle to the reconciliation of our communions (Letter of Pope Paul VI to Archbishop Donald Coggan, 23 March 1976, *AAS* 68), it believes that the principles upon which its doctrinal agreement rests are not affected by such ordinations; for it was concerned with the origin and nature of the ordained ministry and not with the question of who can or cannot be ordained."

¹⁶ See "Appendix 2: The Athens Report," in *The Dublin Agreed Statement*, 1984, pp.58-63.

of the essential nature of the Church, and on the complementary character of social action and worship.¹⁷

These agreements, however, were necessarily coupled with a recognition that while Anglicans and Orthodox might broadly agree on the nature of the Church, they differ as to where the Church is to be found. Anglicans ‘do not believe that they alone are the one true Church, but they believe that they belong to it. Orthodox however believe that the Orthodox Church is the one true Church of Christ, which as his Body is not and cannot be divided.’¹⁸ The two sides took a different view, too, of communion and intercommunion, and of the possibility of gradual growth in relationships between churches. On this point there is a significant divergence between the two dialogues: ARCIC might envisage a process of growth into communion, but for the Orthodox complete doctrinal agreement is a condition of mutual recognition and sacramental communion. The Orthodox approach to doctrine finds no room for the concept of a hierarchy of truths such as the Second Vatican Council envisaged.¹⁹

The Dublin Agreed Statement contained a second section on faith in the Trinity, prayer and holiness, with further reflections on the *filioque* clause.²⁰ The final section concerned worship and tradition. Anglicans shared the Orthodox understanding of Tradition as ‘the constant action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, an unceasing presence of the revelation of the Word of God. Tradition is always open, ready to embrace the present and accept the future.’²¹ They affirmed Scripture as the normative factor within Tradition, but had already, in the Moscow Agreed Statement, rejected any disjunction between Scripture and Tradition that would treat them as two separate ‘sources of revelation’.²² That Statement had already affirmed that Anglicans and Orthodox understand Holy Tradition as ‘the entire life of the Church in the Holy Spirit.’ Dogmatic teaching, liturgical worship, canonical discipline and spiritual life ‘together manifest the single and indivisible life of the Church.’ The Dublin Agreed Statement emphasised the importance of liturgical worship in the life of the Church; and it affirmed too the union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven in a single movement of worship. In the risen Christ the living and the departed are in one communion and fellowship, enjoying a mutual love and solidarity in Christ which is expressed in mutual prayer. On the subject of icons, the Anglican members said in the 1984 Statement said they found no cause to disagree with the Orthodox doctrine of icons as expressed by St John of Damascus.²³ Bearing in mind the statement of the Lambeth Conference of 1888 referred to above, this might be thought one fruit of ‘the constant action of the Holy Spirit’ in the Anglican Church.

¹⁷ “Mystery of the Church,” in *The Dublin Agreed Statement*, 1984, pp. 9-22.

¹⁸ “Mystery of the Church,” no. 9, in *The Dublin Agreed Statement*, 1984, p. 11.

¹⁹ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, § 11.

²⁰ *The Dublin Agreed Statement*, 1984, pp. 23-28.

²¹ “Worship and Tradition,” in *The Dublin Agreed Statement*, 1984, no. 48, p. 29.

²² “Worship and Tradition,” no. 49, p. 29; see “the Moscow Greed Statement,” section III.

²³ “Worship and Tradition,” no. 83, p. 39.

Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue continued

While in its second phase, from 1977 to 1984, A/OJDD was discussing various aspects of the doctrine and life of the Church, ARCIC was concentrating on the issue of authority. It published its second statement on the subject in 1981. In ‘Authority in the Church I’ Anglicans and Roman Catholics had reached a measure of agreement, including on the basic principles of primacy. ‘Authority in the Church II’²⁴ examined four outstanding problems in this area: the Petrine texts, the meaning of language of ‘divine right’, the affirmation of papal infallibility, and the nature of the jurisdiction ascribed to the Bishop of Rome as universal primate. It was of course not possible to reach general agreement on these issues. But the Anglican members agreed that a ministry modelled on the role of Peter would be needed in a reunited Church, and that such a ministry could properly be exercised by the Bishop of Rome. ‘It is possible’, ‘Authority in the Church II’ said, ‘to think 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, while admitting that the New Testament texts offer no sufficient basis for this.’²⁵

While Anglicans and Roman Catholics might disagree about the precise role of the bishop of Rome, and in particular about his infallibility and universal jurisdiction, Anglicans and Orthodox were broadly at one on these issues. The Dublin Agreed Statement, in its section ‘The Mystery of the Church’, was clear that ‘infallibility is not the property of any particular person within the Church’: only God is infallible.²⁶ At Dublin Anglicans and Orthodox agreed that a bishop who exercises primacy or seniority at whatever level does not have the right to intervene arbitrarily in the affairs of a diocese other than his own.²⁷ They were clear too that primacy or seniority should be understood as a ministry of service and support and not as a form of domination.²⁸ The tone of the Dublin Agreed Statement on this issue was sufficiently divergent from that of ARCIC’s two statements on authority to evoke from the Anglican Co-chairman of ARCIC a letter of mild rebuke to the Anglicans on A/OJDD for taking a different view from that of their ARCIC colleagues.

The different approaches of the two commissions illustrate the tendency of bilateral dialogues to be conditioned by the specific preoccupations of the two partners. While this may be inevitable, it also highlights the need for each bilateral dialogue to relate to others considering the same issues. Authority and primacy have subsequently emerged as the central issue in all dialogues in which Rome is an interlocutor. It is central to the renewed Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue, as well as to continuing Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue. It would be of great value if ways could be found of ensuring that Anglican-

²⁴ “Authority in the Church II,” in ARCIC, *The Final Report*, pp. 88-100.

²⁵ “Authority in the Church II,” no. 7, p. 84.

²⁶ “Mystery of the Church,” no. 29, in *The Dublin Agreed Statement*, 1984, p. 19; see “The Moscow Agreed Statement,” IV, nos. 17-18, pp. 86-87.

²⁷ “Mystery of the Church,” no. 25, p. 17.

²⁸ “Mystery of the Church,” no. 23, p. 16.

Orthodox, Anglican-Roman Catholic, and Orthodox-Roman Catholic discussion of this issue could be co-ordinated.

ARCIC II and the Third Phase of Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue

While a new ARCIC was appointed in 1982 to continue the work of ARCIC I, after the publication of the Dublin Agreed Statement of 1984 there was a hiatus in Anglican-Orthodox international dialogue: it was five years before a new Commission met in 1989. It was re-named as the International Commission for the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, ICAOTD for short. The two dialogues followed interestingly different paths. ARCIC II first considered the doctrine of justification, which it set in a wider context in its statement *Salvation and the Church*, published in 1987.²⁹ The topic was chosen in order to reassure evangelical Anglicans that their particular concerns were not being neglected. It went on to study the understanding of the Church as Communion;³⁰ and its important 1991 agreed statement related the life in communion of Christians to the life in communion of the Persons of the Trinity. Ecclesial communion is expressed in a shared faith, participation in a common Eucharist, a single ministry, and shared commitment to mission. In 1994 ARCIC II broke new ecumenical ground in 'Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church'³¹, a recognition that ethical issues as well as doctrinal can be matters of disagreement among the churches. 'The Gift of Authority' in 1999 was the third of ARCIC's statements on authority.³² Against the background of developments in both churches, it set out a view of authority rooted in Christ himself. It affirms that the Scriptures 'occupy a unique and normative place' within Tradition;³³ it speaks of the importance of the *sensus fidelium* in the life of the local church,³⁴ and of the work of the Spirit in the communion of local churches.³⁵ Synodality and the collegiality of bishops is given prominence, and the ministry of the bishop of Rome in the discernment of truth is set within the context of conciliar and collegial authority.³⁶ There is much convergence between this statement and the work of A/OJDD and ICAOTD on these subjects. The most recent statement of ARCIC II, 'Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ',³⁷ published in 2005, curiously finds no parallel so far in the Anglican-Orthodox international dialogue.

That dialogue completed in Cyprus the programme of work adopted at New Valaamo in 1989. Entitled 'The Church of the Triune God', ICAOTD published the Cyprus Agreed

²⁹ ARCIC, "Salvation and the Church," in Jeffery GROS – E. Rozanne ELDER – Ellen K. WONDRA (eds.), *Common Witness to the Gospel: Documents on Anglican Roman Catholic Relations 1983 – 1995* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1997) pp. 30-42.

³⁰ ARCIC, "Church as Communion," in *Common Witness to the Gospel*, pp. 4-22.

³¹ ARCIC, "Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church," in *Common Witness to the Gospel*, pp. 185-216.

³² ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority: Authority and the Church III* (London: Catholic Truth Society/Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1999).

³³ ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority*, no. 19, p. 19.

³⁴ ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority*, nos. 29-31, pp. 23-24.

³⁵ ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority*, no. 35, p. 26.

³⁶ ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority*, nos. 45-47, pp. 32-34.

³⁷ ARCIC, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (Toronto: Novalis, 2005).

Statement in January 2007.³⁸ It sees the doctrine of the Church as rooted in the doctrine of God as Trinity. Its understanding of the Church as communion, of the charism of the laity in discerning truth, of the primary importance of the local church, of conciliarity, and of the Eucharist as the concrete expression of the local church, closely parallels the work of ARCIC I and II on those subjects. ICAOTD is more reserved on the subject of Roman primacy than ARCIC II, while admitting a proper ministry for the Bishop of Rome in the communion of all the local churches.³⁹ The degree of agreement reached on ecclesiology is significant for its own sake. But the third phase of the Anglican-Orthodox International Dialogue was concerned to study the doctrine of the Church not least in order to proceed to a study of the doctrine of the Church's ministry, and to go on to consider the question of who may be ordained to it. Its studies of Christ and the Church, the Spirit and the Church, Christ and Humanity, and Christ and Culture, were designed to provide the theological context in which arguments for and against the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate might be assessed. It was inevitable that Anglicans and Orthodox would not agree on this issue. But the contrast between the Orthodox attitude in 1977 and more recent discussion is striking. Then, the Orthodox maintained there was nothing to discuss: the ordination of women was simply unthinkable. The Cyprus Agreed Statement includes the recognition that it is an open theological subject.⁴⁰ On this issue there is a sharp contrast with the official Vatican view, enunciated during the papacy of John Paul II, that this subject may not even be discussed in the Roman Catholic Church.⁴¹ It reflects the fact that a small number of Orthodox theologians see no theological reason why women should not be ordained, and a somewhat larger number is prepared to acknowledge that it is theological issue which the Orthodox Church has not yet addressed.

The Cyprus Agreed Statement contains much material of considerable theological interest. Not least does it deal with the filioque question in a new way, by setting out the complex inter-relationship of Son and Spirit in the economy of salvation and the communion of Persons in the Trinity. By looking at it in a fresh light, the Commission hopes it may have contributed to a resolution of a theological issue so long at the centre of East-West theological disagreement.⁴²

³⁸ International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue, *The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus Statement* (Anglican Communion, 2007). See <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/orthodox/docs/pdf/The%20Church%20of%20the%20Triune%20God.pdf>

³⁹ "V. *Episcopate, Episcopos, and Primacy*," in *The Cyprus Statement*, nos. 19 and 21, pp. 36-42.

⁴⁰ "VII. Women and Men, Ministries in the Church," in *The Cyprus Statement*, no. 37, iii, p. 58: "The Orthodox think that in the context of the ongoing ecumenical dialogue, questions of such seriousness and significance as the ordination of women to the priesthood require profound theological examination. The cost of schism or of the perpetuation of division is too high to outweigh any pastoral benefits that may result from such innovation. While appreciating the pastoral motivation that has led the Anglican Communion to ordain women to the priesthood, the Orthodox think that the theological dimension of this matter remains open, and deserves further and deeper consideration and study in ecumenical dialogue."

⁴¹ JOHN PAUL II, "*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*," in *Origins*, 24 (June 9, 1994), pp. 49, 51-52.

⁴² "II. Christ, the Spirit and the Church," in *The Cyprus Statement*, especially nos. 45-47, p. 22.

The statement also deals with two issues which the Commission believes crucial in ecumenical dialogue: heresy and schism,⁴³ and reception. A whole section is devoted to the issue of reception in the Church of new ideas and new practices, and a necessary distinction is made between the two: new practices, like the ordination of women, affect the life of the Church immediately, while new ideas can be discussed for a long time before they are either accepted or rejected by the Church as a whole.⁴⁴ ARCIC II also has a short section on 'Reception and Re-Reception' in 'The Gift of Authority'.⁴⁵ The approach of both dialogues is similar. ICAOTD thought that a discussion of heresy and schism was important, not least in order to define the former. In all churches some Christians are far too ready to accuse those who think differently from them of heresy, using the word in so loose a way that what should be a precise theological term becomes a general term of reproach and even abuse.

ARCIC II and ICAOTD: Phases Concluded

The work of ARCIC II and ICAOTD has been brought to a conclusion at much the same time. Both Commissions have recorded a considerable measure of agreement over a range of issues. They have been able to do so not least because of the warmth of personal relationships built up over the years among members of the respective Commissions. But that inner cohesion of the Commissions may be the reason why their work has been subjected to criticism within the churches they represent. The Final Response issued in 1991 by the Congregation for the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity seemed to disallow the ARCIC method of going behind traditional disagreements, and to expect Anglicans to conform with traditional Roman Catholic language. From the Anglican side, too, the agreed statements of both ARCIC I and ARCIC II have been criticised, not least by evangelicals insistent on the final authority of Scripture. So far there has been no official Orthodox response to the three Anglican-Orthodox agreed statements. There are undoubtedly Anglicans, Orthodox and Roman Catholics who disagree with some of the agreements registered in the various agreed statements. It may be that members of theological commissions can run ahead of a good deal of opinion in their respective churches, whose general membership lacks the personal relationship with Christians of other traditions and the mutual respect and trust built up within each commission.

Reception of Ecumenical Dialogues

The work of both Commissions is in process of being assessed in the churches which appointed them. It is significant that their work has continued despite the fresh difficulties posed first by the ordination of women, and more recently by the ordination of openly gay clergy. The process of assessment is uneven. In the Anglican Communion more attention has been paid to the work of ARCIC I and II than to the work of A/OJDD and ICAOTD. Rome has paid more public attention to the work of ARCIC than the Orthodox

⁴³ "VIII. Heresy and Schism in the Church," in *The Cyprus Statement*, pp. 59-63.

⁴⁴ "IX. Reception in Communion," in *The Cyprus Statement*, pp. 63-75.

⁴⁵ ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority*, nos. 24-25, pp. 21-22.

Churches have given to that of the two Anglican-Orthodox Commissions. There have moreover been developments in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations which so far have had no parallel in Anglican-Orthodox relations. In 1996 John Paul II and Archbishop Carey issues a Common Declaration which acknowledged the obstacle to reconciliation posed by the ordination of women, and suggested the time was right for further consultation about how the relationship between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church was to progress. That consultation took place in 2000 at Mississauga, and as a result the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, IARCCUM, was set up. It is preparing a common declaration which will identify those areas in which agreement in faith has already been reached by ARCIC, and those in which differences remain to be addressed. IARCCUM's review of ARCIC's work will be part of the process of receiving that work in both churches.⁴⁶

Both ARCIC and A/OJDD-ICAOTD have registered significant agreement on a range of issues. Ecclesiology has emerged as the central issue in these as in other bilateral dialogues: it is the theme of the renewed Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue. While there is an important measure of agreement on what has come to be called eucharistic ecclesiology, a distinction has to be drawn between the Catholic and the Orthodox approaches. On the Roman Catholic side the Second Vatican Council recognised in other Christian communities a measure of ecclesiality, based on the acceptance of all baptism performed with water in the Trinitarian name. The Orthodox were sister churches; other bodies were ecclesial communities, and among them the Anglican Communion was singled out as having preserved more elements of true ecclesial being.⁴⁷ The official Orthodox position is that the Orthodox is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of the creed. Some Orthodox baptise again Christians who wish to join the Orthodox Church. Agreement on the nature of the Church is one thing; agreement on where that Church is to be found is another. It may be easier to make progress on this front in Anglican-Roman Catholic than in Anglican-Orthodox dialogue.

The Future of Anglican-Orthodox and Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogues

It would be rash to predict with confidence the future course of Anglican relations with either Orthodox or Roman Catholics. In all churches there is a resurgence of views and attitudes which make reconciliation more difficult. In recent decades vocal anti-Western, anti-ecumenical tendencies have appeared in Orthodox Churches. In the Roman Catholic Church traditionalist trends, sometimes critical of the Second Vatican Council, are also evident. Within Anglicanism the revival of an extreme form of evangelicalism not only threatens the unity of the Anglican Communion, but poses an obstacle to the reception of the work of both ARCIC and A/OJDD-ICAOTD: some of its adherents consider icons as idols and Rome as still the scarlet woman. At the level of church leadership it has already been made clear that Anglicans and Roman Catholics are committed to continuing

⁴⁶ International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission, "Growing Together in Unity and Mission: Building on Forty Years of Anglican Roman Catholic Dialogue (2007)," at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/iarccum/docs/pdf/Growing%20Together%20in%20Unity%20and%20Mission%20definitive.pdf>.

⁴⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*

theological dialogue and practical co-operation, controversial ministerial and ethical issues notwithstanding. It is to be hoped that Anglicans and Orthodox will make a similar commitment; and that both dialogues, as they continue, will find ways in which each can take official note of the other's work. Both too will no doubt pay close attention to the work of the revived Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue. For while it may be easier to make progress in some bilateral dialogues than in others, it is important that all Christian traditions, new and old alike, should find ways of working together to proclaim the good news of God's love, revealed in Jesus Christ and shared with us by the Holy Spirit. Christianity is becoming more rather than less diverse; yet at the same time the need for united Christian witness in an increasingly problematic world is also becoming greater.