Reflections on ARCIC II

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That great ecumenical visionary and statesman Archbishop William Wake, writing in reply to Bossuet exactly three hundred years before ARCIC's statement on justification, speculated that if points of terminology between the Anglican and Roman Catholic doctrines of justification could be clarified—particularly the distinction between justification and sanctification—agreement on the doctrine (if not the

practices flowing from it) would be close and it would become apparent that both Churches held the foundation of the faith in common.[1] The first agreed statement of the Second Anglican— Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II), *Salvation and the Church*,[2] at last brings that agreement significantly closer. In evaluating this document I propose first to examine its method, comparing this with ARCIC I, on which it presents a marked improvement; second, to summarize the substance of the statement; and third, to ask whether its presentation of the doctrine of justification is consistent with the Anglican understanding(s) of it.

(1) THE METHODS OF THE TWO COMMISSIONS COMPARED

The preface to the *Final Report* of ARCIC I recapitulates the Commission's method of approach. 'From the beginning,' it states,

> we were determined, in accordance with our mandate, and in the spirit of Phil. 3.13, 'forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead', to discover each other's faith as it is today and to appeal to history only for enlightenment, not as a way of perpetuating past controversy.[3]

In line with this policy, specific reference in the text of the agreements to the doctrinal formularies of the two Communions was minimal. This has given rise to frustration on both sides. On the Roman Catholic side Cardinal Ratzinger and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith have requested greater reference to the Anglican confessional documents. On the Anglican side, I for one have argued that the historical sources embody the corporate memories of their Churches and suggested that if agreed statements were to set out frankly and fully the areas of remaining disagreement, as well as the areas where common ground had been discovered, they would perform a more valuable service to ecumenism in the long run.[4]

On this score, ARCIC II is more satisfactory than its predecessor: it does indeed provide more extensive reference to both Roman Catholic and Anglican formularies. This serves to guard against ambiguity on the part of the agreed statement and misunderstanding on the part of its readers. A mandate for this approach is found in the essay 'The Reconciliation of Memories' by Mark Santer, the Anglican co-chairman,[5] where he speaks impressively of Christians fearlessly facing the past together and re-educating their memories of each other. Contrary to the assumption of ARCIC I, bringing the past to light need not be a way of perpetuating old controversies. 'The study of past controversies of which the final outcome is known destroys the spirit of prejudice.'[6]

The early agreements of ARCIC I (on the Eucharist and the ministry) were far too short. *Salvation and the Church* is longer but not long enough. Allowing for repetition, which in this sensitive area is not perhaps superfluous, and flights of eloquence—again appropriate

when the substance of the gospel is being proclaimed—the statement is still not full enough for informed study and response. I would have liked an even more concise agreed statement without some of the rhetoric but accompanied by more extensive references to Trent and the Anglican formularies. For example, we are told that 'Anglican theologians reacted to the decree [of the Council of Trent on justification] in a variety of ways, some sympathetic, others critical at least on particular points.'[7] Though this is followed by a note of the versions of the decree now available and of the principal Anglican documents and authors before 1661, the text here is far too vague. What does it mean that they were 'sympathetic'? And there was not a single Anglican divine who was not critical of Trent 'at least on particular points'. This is one weak spot and it is not typical: but can I make a plea for fuller and more precise documentation?

The method of ARCIC I has recently been the subject of an exchange of letters in the *Church Times* which began with John Moorman, a member of the Commission, suggesting that compromise and the exchange of concessions play a part in reaching an ecumenical agreement.[8] In response Henry McAdoo, the Anglican co-chairman of ARCIC I, claimed that the Anglican and Roman Catholic members of the Commission set out to explore together the teachings of the Gospels and the ancient common traditions.[9] They happily experienced a convergence of views and reached an ecumenical consensus. McAdoo rejected the suggestion that compromise and concession were involved. This revealing correspondence prompts several comments.

(a) There is bound to be compromise in reaching an agreement between any two parties whose interests do not exactly coincide. There is nothing objectionable or unethical in this. Any future form of church unity will inevitably involve concessions on both (or all) sides. But this was not part of ARCIC's brief (as McAdoo rightly implies). Concessions and compromises belong to negotiations: the members of the Commission were not negotiators. That role, if and when it is required, will belong to the governing bodies of the Churches concerned, or their representatives appointed for precisely that purpose.

(b) Moorman mentions the important but neglected distinction between fundamentals and non-fundamentals (perhaps more familiar to us as the question of the essence of Christianity or the concept of the hierarchy of truths). Without entering into the question of what the fundamentals of the faith are, and how we know what they are, it would presumably be agreed that any concessions would have to fall into the category of non-fundamentals. But this approach also was not apparently part of ARCIC's remit. The first Commission did not set out, as far as we know, to ask such questions as: What is fundamental in Christianity? What truths are necessary to salvation? What is the gospel? What constitutes a Christian Church? What more, if anything, is necessary for valid orders and sacraments? What, in the light of these principles, are the minimum requirements for

intercommunion? If that approach had been adopted, the issues at stake might seem clearer to us now. Instead, however, ARCIC I chose to tackle problems of doctrinal agreement across a broad front, with some resulting loss of coherence. The 1981 introduction to the *Final Report* observed that 'controversy between our communions has centred on the Eucharist, on the meaning and function of ordained ministry, and on the nature and exercise of authority in the Church'.[10] The glaring omission of justification from this catalogue has now been rectified. Now the question of justification is at the centre of those things that are fundamental or, as the Thirty-nine Articles characteristically put it, necessary to salvation. Few would deny that justification is at the heart of the gospel. On the question of justification there can be no compromise—and in my view ARCIC II has not indulged in it.

(c) Regrettably, that cannot be said of ARCIC I. There are points in the *Final Report* where what the Commission sees as convergence in the truth look even to the well-disposed reader suspiciously like negotiated compromises. The question of papal primacy is the clearest (though not the only) example. Both the Reformers and later Anglican divines saw no insuperable objection to accepting a primacy of honour (though not, needless to say, a universal jurisdiction) for the Bishop of Rome, provided that this primacy was understood as being not of divine right, but a purely human arrangement which the Church was entitled to make for the sake of peace and unity. ARCIC I renounces the rhetoric of divine right, acknowledging that there is no sound basis in the New Testament for a perpetual Petrine office in the Church. But the Commission nevertheless proposes that papal primacy should be accepted for any united Church of the future on the grounds that it is part of the divine intention and purpose as revealed through the providential ordering of church history.[11] Let us leave aside all the difficulties entailed in claiming that we know what the will of God is, except as it is revealed in Scripture, and set aside also the weaknesses inherent in any appeal to the workings of providence in history (are the Eastern Churches equally providential? the Reformation? the Old Catholics? Methodism?). My objection is that to appeal to the will of God manifested through his providential ordering of history is to introduce divine right by the back door. If the papacy is the will of God, and we can know that it is, whether through Scripture or providence, woe betide all who resist his will. If it is the will of God, it moves up in the hierarchy of truths from things indifferent to things fundamental, from matters that are subject to discussion to claims that are non-negotiable. It begins to impinge on the area of truths necessary for salvation. By accepting the notion of a papacy by divine right, by the back door of providential ordering of history, the Anglican representatives on ARCIC I have at a stroke given away what the Churches of the Reformation, including the Anglican Church, have consistently and discriminatingly upheld for four hundred years.

(2) THE SUBSTANCE OF THE AGREED STATEMENT

It is presumably not necessary to summarize a booklet that can be bought for 65p and read carefully in half an hour. Every thinking Christian should have a copy for personal study. It will suffice to highlight the significant points. Among the preliminary matter, firstly we note with approval that the document is offered for discussion and criticism—provided the latter are put forward 'in a constructive and fraternal spirit'.[12] However, it is not clear to me how the spirit of criticism can be judged by those on the receiving end. The imputation of motives is itself notoriously unconstructive. There is always the danger that 'negative' criticism will be deemed unfraternal and unconstructive. Let all criticisms be weighed on their merits—I feel sure that this is what the Commission intends. Secondly, it is good to see the co-chairmen in their preface taking their cue from 'the one baptismal faith which we all share'[13] which was celebrated and proclaimed by the Pope and the Archbishop in Canterbury Cathedral in May 1982. The statement returns to this theme later when it speaks of Holy Baptism as 'the unrepeatable sacrament of justification and incorporation into Christ'.[14] I would like to see a deeper exploration of the foundational sacrament of baptism and the significance of our shared baptismal faith (so important for Richard Hooker's ecclesiology) in the future work of the Commission. Thirdly, it is encouraging to learn that the Commission has benefited from the Lutheran–Roman Catholic agreement on justification by faith in the USA in 1983.[15] If the heirs of Luther can reach agreement with the heirs of Bellarmine it augurs well for the ecumenical enterprise. Finally in these preliminaries, the co-chairmen remind us that the goal of ARCIC is 'the restoration of full ecclesial communion' between the Anglican and Roman Communions.[16] When unpacking this gleaming phrase, we would be well advised not to be misled by the word 'restoration' into forgetting the unedifying conflicts, rivalries, resentments and power struggles that were the mark of Anglo-Roman relations *before* the Reformation. I am afraid that I remain unimpressed by the prospect of interlocking structures of jurisdiction and decision-making. I still prefer to measure progress in these matters by the growth of charity, mutual acceptance and the nearer prospect of kneeling together to receive the one bread and drink from the one cup. But that is not a criticism of ARCIC II, for those are no doubt precisely its concerns as well.

The keynote of the agreed statement is clear from the start: the heart of the gospel proclaimed by the Church is 'salvation through the grace of God in Christ';[17] the theme of pure unmerited grace is dominant from first to last. The difficulties—and the substances of the Commission's task—begin with the work of comparing the decree of the Council of Trent with the Anglican formularies (i.e. articles 11–14 of the Thirty-nine and Cranmer's homily 'Of Salvation', to which article 11 refers, together with the 'classical' interpreters of the

Anglican doctrine of justification: Hooker, Field, Andrewes, Daven-
ant, Hall, Beveridge, etc.). Here the sixteen sections and thirty-three
anathemas of Trent contrast with the conciseness and simplicity of the
Anglican Articles which testify to the characteristic Anglican
reticence in the matter of dogma. This is one of those differences of
theological horizon that are the submerged part of the iceberg of
ecumenical theology which lurks in the waters of ecumenical
endeavour and may one day make its presence all too apparent.[18]

The statement suggests that the conflict between Reformation and
Anglican views of justification on the one hand, and the doctrine of
Trent on the other is largely attributable to differences of
terminology, mutual misunderstanding and a tendency to caricature
the opposition. The Reformers and later Anglican divines define
justification as the act of reconciliation flowing from the grace of God
through the imputation of Christ's righteousness or merits to the sinner
and received by faith irrespective of any progress in sanctification.
Roman Catholic doctrine regards justification as equivalent to the
whole process of salvation, not just its inception, as flowing from the
grace of God and as taking effect through the infusion of the
righteousness of God into the soul, not as of human merit but solely on
account of the merits of Christ. The vital conceptual distinction which
the Reformers made between justification and sanctification was
intended to safeguard the unmerited givenness of divine grace, but it
was open to being misunderstood as devaluing the need for holiness
'without which no man shall see the Lord' and the fruits of a
regenerate life. The Reformers' stress on the external, 'alien', 'not my
own', imputed character of justifying righteousness was intended to
cut through the merit-mongering of later medieval popular religion,
but it was taken by the fathers of the Council of Trent to imply that no
actual change was involved. If the Reformers emphasized the truth
'He died that we might be forgiven', Trent was concerned to stress the
truth 'He died to make us good'. The Reformers' watchword *sola fide*
was intended to suggest 'nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy
cross I cling'. Faith was merely receptive, the subjective appropriation
of the benefits of Christ. In Trent's anathema of justification by faith
alone, faith was interpreted as a vain human boasting confidence that
we are justified. Roman Catholics did not deny imputation, but it was
merely preliminary to impartation. Protestants did not dispute
infusion—this was inseparable from their doctrine of union with
Christ—but it was not on the basis of any infused righteousness that we
were justified in the sight of God. For Catholics justification was
eschatological: it looked forward to our ultimate redemption, our
hoped for acquittal at the last judgement, when good works and actual
righteousness would not be irrelevant. For Protestants justification
was immanent; it was realized eschatology—even now through our
union with Christ we are seated with him in heavenly places. If
Protestants responded to distortions of Catholic doctrine in popular
piety, distortions not sufficiently discouraged by the Church,

Catholics reacted to distortions of Protestant teaching, distortions that polemic and popularization had tended to invite. But the fact remains that Reformation theology had recovered the authentic Pauline meaning of justification as a forensic or juridical term; the appropriation of this in modern Roman Catholic scholarship is conducive to a new mutual understanding.

The statement concludes that in the central area of the doctrine of salvation there need be no dispute. Any outstanding differences of interpretation or emphasis are not sufficient in themselves to justify the continued separation of the Communions. This conclusion is surely justified. Thirty years ago Hans Küng reached a similar result in his pioneering work *Justification*.[19] The findings of both Küng and the Commission are now broadly endorsed by Alister McGrath's conclusions in his indispensable *Iustitia Dei*.[20]

(3) THE ANGLICAN RECEPTION OF *SALVATION AND THE CHURCH*

Some will respond to this statement by measuring it against St Paul, others against Luther. Neither will have much to complain about. But as Anglican participants in the ecumenical process, we have to measure it not against Luther or St Paul but against the Anglican formularies and the expositions of Anglican divines. The Thirty-nine Articles make only a fairly perfunctory reference to justification— more of an assertion than a definition in fact. Neither article 11 nor the homily 'Of Salvation' to which it refers employs the concept of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. In this omission the article follows the corresponding article of the Augsburg Confession, of which it appears to be an attenuated version. The Anglican Reformers themselves did not follow Luther closely in the matter of justification, the earlier Reformers tending to be Erasmian and moralistic, the later more indebted to Calvin's admirably clear and sound definitions of justification. The so-called 'classical' Anglican position on justification, as Allison calls it,[21] was worked out by Hooker and Davenant and endorsed by Field, Andrewes, Hall and Downame. It sought a balance and coherence between justification and sanctification, imputation and impartation, St Paul and St James. Justification was forensic; faith was fiduciary; imputed righteousness was perfect; inherent righteousness imperfect. These writers saw Trent as an assault on the Reformation understanding of justification and condemned its anathemas as schismatic. But they did not deny the Roman Catholic Church to be a true Church, though erring, nor that she possessed the gospel, nor that salvation was to be found within her communion. As Hooker put it, she held the foundation of the faith but erred in 'a consequent', an inference, a deduction from the essential gospel. In spite of this, however, it must be admitted that these classical Anglican divines did not see the possibilities for reconstruction and consensus that recent research has revealed.

But the classical view is not the only doctrine of justification to be found within Anglicanism. A later school is represented pre-eminently by Bull and Waterland, though it was pioneered by Forbes and anticipated by Hammond and Thorndike (and arguably by elements in Hooker). This 'holy living' school places greater weight on repentance and obedience as human works stemming from the divine infusion of a principle of regenerate life, preparing us for justification. But the difference between the classical view and the 'holy living' school is not as great as is sometimes suggested (e.g. by Allison and McGrath). It remains a matter of emphasis. For the later divines justification is forensic and imputation is affirmed; merit is disallowed; the distinction between justification and sanctification is preserved; repentance and obedience are the conditions not the causes of justification, which is still said to be by faith. The Anglicanism of Bull and Waterland still had a gospel to offer.

McGrath has stressed that the Tridentine doctrine of justification is by no means monolithic; a variety of views derived from the medieval schools is permitted. The same evidently applies to Anglicanism. If we acknowledge our great divines, we are bound to make room for a variety of interpretations, though a continuing consensus can be recognized. An ecumenical statement on justification will not attempt a definitive doctrine but will seek common ground and rule out certain unacceptable deviations. This *Salvation and the Church* does very adequately.

But that is not the end of the matter. Though neither Trent nor Bellarmine denied imputation as such,[22] it certainly did not function pivotally in their doctrine. The emphasis was all on the infusion of the perfect righteousness of God through the merits of Christ. The Reformers objected fundamentally to this interpretation of justification. They held it to be unevangelical and unpastoral. Hooker asserted that it perverted the truth of Christ and bereaved men of comfort in life and death. The Church of Rome, Hooker claimed, causes her followers to tread a theological maze when they ask her the way of justification.[23] The Reformers maintained that it led to errors concerning merit, penance, indulgences, works of supererogation and sin (concupiscence) remaining in the believer. It is the same maze that we find being retrodden in the contortions of Newman's lectures on justification,[24] though the latter contains insights that both Küng and ARCIC II have been glad to avail themselves of.

These outstanding questions are not directed at the Commission: they cannot cover everything. Luther held that if you got justification right other matters would fall into place eventually. It is just to say that this agreement does not go all the way. Some Evangelical Anglicans may feel that it does not go far enough. In so saying they will be forgetting that there exists a diversity of Anglican views on justification, yet one that is no bar to communion. A strong current within Anglicanism has consistently maintained that the terms of salvation (the gospel) suffice as terms of (inter)communion. John

Hales (d. 1656), who had imbibed deeply the meaning and spirit of Hooker, once commented that the fundamentals were those things we held in common with Rome and non-fundamentals those things wherein we disagreed.[25] Division arises and is perpetuated where non-fundamentals are made things necessary to salvation and/or conditions of communion. ARCIC II has contributed to an agreement on the fundamentals of the faith which is significant not only for the content but also for the method of ecumenical theology.

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Notes

1 W. Wake, *An Exposition of the Doctrine of the Church of England* (1686), p. 21.
2 *Salvation and the Church* An Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (Catholic Truth Society/Church House Publishing 1987).
3 ARCIC I, *The Final Report* (SPCK 1981), pp. 1f.
4 P. Avis, *Ecumenical Theology* (SPCK 1986), esp. pp. x, 44.
5 M. Santer, 'The Reconciliation of Memories' in Santer (ed.), *Their Lord and Ours* (SPCK 1982).
6 G. M. Trevelyan, *Clio: A Muse* (London² 1930), p. 153.
7 ARCIC II, *Salvation and the Church*, p. 10.
8 J. Moorman, *Church Times*, 28 November 1986.
9 H. McAdoo, *Church Times*, 9 January 1987.
10 ARCIC I, *The Final Report* (SPCK 1981), p. 5.
11 ibid., pp. 83ff.
12 ARCIC II, *Salvation and the Church*, p. 5.
13 ibid., p. 6.
14 ibid., p. 18.
15 ibid., p. 7.
16 ibid.
17 ibid., p. 10.
18 cf. Avis, *Ecumenical Theology*, pp. xiif.
19 Hans Küng, *Justification* (ET 1966) (Burns & Oates 1981).
20 A. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 2 vols (Cambridge University Press 1986). See below, p. 471.
21 C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism* (SPCK 1966).
22 Küng, *Justification*, pp. 218, 220.
23 R. Hooker, *Works*, III (Oxford 1845), pp. 489, 491, 495.
24 J. H. Newman, *Lectures on Justification* (1838).
25 J. Hales, *Works*, I (1765), p. 73.