

Morals sub_group

The hymn to Christ which is in the first chapter of the Letter to the Colossians speaks of the Risen Lord in these terms:

"All things were created
through him and for him.
He is before all things
and in him all things hold together."

It is the faith of the Church that all things were created in Christ and that through the resurrection of Christ the created order was renewed. Christians participate in this new creation through the common life they share by baptism. Through baptism we become members of the Body of Christ. As members of Christ, we share his life. So the common life is something much more profound than a mere set of resemblances among Christians. It is not just that each of us lives a life that is somehow like the lives of others. It is rather that this life is lived in the first instance by the community, by the whole Body, and therefore by each individual who is a member of it.

The ethos of the restored creation is an ethos of love - the love revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom 5,5). This is how the New Testament concept of agapè is to be understood. Love is the basis of Christian community: it gives life to the Body and binds us in the unity of the People of God.

One mark of this common life is the sharing of goods. Indeed, the use of the term Koinonia in Acts 2,44 and 4,32 points directly to this. Those who have a common life put their gifts and their resources at one another's disposal in some way or other, though how this is done may vary. Another mark, given prominence in the same section of Acts is a common mind. When we speak of a common mind in an ethical context, however, we do not mean quite the same things as would be

meant in relation to theoretical reasoning. Practical deliberation differs from theoretical reflection in that the questions are constantly being posed afresh: we can never make the same moral decision twice, since each decision becomes an act which passes into history. What is involved in having a common mind in practical reasoning is not simply a consensus on certain propositions (as one might agree, say, on the proposition that sacraments are necessary to the Church). It is a common approach to each new deliberative challenge, presuming on the agreement which we have in Christian truth, and working patiently towards a common decision which will enable us to act together.

This common mind is not an abstraction. It is a vital part of our common life in the Body of Christ and has been so since apostolic times. The common mind mentioned in Acts 2,42 was an integral feature of the apostolic koinonia. The historical dimension of that koinonia since apostolic times is what we refer to by the term Tradition. Christian Tradition has involved the ongoing discernment of what is involved in the common life through the continuing use of practical reasoning on the part of the baptised. This process involves both continuity and discontinuity. The fundamental values that constitute the Christian ethos of love remain constant. But as the Church is planted in different cultures, as it faces new questions such, for example as those posed today by new technology, the exercise of practical reasoning will yield fresh findings which deepen and renew the common mind.

These are principles on which Anglicans and Catholics can agree. The question now needs to be cast in the ecumenical context. We must pose a question that must be addressed by Anglicans and Catholics as they seek to heal their historic divisions: Do we, despite four hundred years of separate development, and despite different procedures for decision-making, nonetheless have a common approach sufficient to enable us to carry forward this enterprise together?

Since the time when the Malta Report first charted a course for Anglican-Roman Catholic ecumenical dialogue, there appears to have been a developing anxiety abroad that the gains in common understanding of doctrinal issues might be offset by deep underlying divisions about Christian morality. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its Observations on the Final Report of ARCIC-I asked that "moral teaching" should be given an "important place" among the remaining "points which constitute an obstacle to unity", while a recent Anglican commentator on Anglican-Roman Catholic relations listed a number of "very considerable differences" between the two Communion; in this area notably on the dissolubility of marriage, contraception, abortion, in vitro fertilisation, embryo research, homosexual relations, masturbation and sterilisation. While this list is excessively detailed, insofar as it includes matters on which it is hard to trace any definitive positions taken by Anglican Churches, let alone the Anglican Communion as a whole, the list is representative of a popular perception at least that our two Communion differ especially in the areas of sexual and medical ethics.

For the indissolubility of marriage, indeed, and the use of artificial contraception, documentary evidence of disagreement can be produced, in the one case a longstanding disagreement and in the other, a more recent one. Fortunately, there seems to be little current concern that the two Churches may differ on political or socio-economic theory, despite the distinctive Roman Catholic contributions in these areas during the past century.

Our view is that there do not exist fundamental differences in our concept of how moral decisions are reached which preclude our being united in the exercise of practical reasoning for the formation of a common mind. Certainly we have found that perceived differences of approach give rise to caricatures of Roman Catholic ethics on the one

hand as oppressively authoritarian, and of Anglican ethics on the other as irresolutely relativist. What Anglicans and Catholics must now do is for each to look very carefully at the way in which the other approaches ethics so as to move towards a situation in which we may address moral issues together. For this to be a realistic proposal we must take account of several major concerns. We now list five of them:

- 1) There is a difference in the processes by which our two communions deliberate on moral questions and reach their judgment. This difference is often referred to as a disagreement on "moral authority", but that, in our view, is a misnomer. On moral authority as such - that is to say, the authority of the good - we cannot trace a disagreement. It is disclosed to us in the revelation of God's will in Jesus, attested by the Scriptures and reflected on by tradition; it confers upon the community of faith, in the first instance, and on the individual believer in the second an authority to discern, to decide, to give counsel and to act, all in the name of Jesus Christ. Where different assumptions emerge is not in the sphere of moral authority, but in the sphere of ecclesial authority, i.e. the form and structure of ministry through which we mediate this moral authority to one another; and here they are no greater and no less in the realm of morals than in the realm of doctrine. The Roman Catholic communion has a more sharply defined teaching magisterium located centrally within the broader ministry of the Church. Anglican churches have assumed that the primary locus of authority to teach morals lies with the individual presbyter or bishop in the exercise of his pastoral and preaching ministry; only when particular controversies have needed wider consideration have Anglicans felt the need for a more broadly based deliberative process, and in recent times this has been provided sometimes by national synods and sometimes by the Lambeth Conference. It is important to avoid caricature at this point: the authority to teach morals has as its correlative the authority to act on the part of the believers who profit from the Church's teaching. Neither of our Churches has conceived

that the moral agent is a merely passive and quiescent recipient of instruction; both count on the conscientious engagement of each believer in the tasks of discernment and decision which no one can undertake on another's behalf. Neither church, on the other hand, has conceived of the believer as exercising isolated autonomy without responsibility to the moral tradition of the Church mediated through its teaching ministry.

To this we may add that the Anglican preference has been to leave its teaching undefined wherever it has seemed safe to 'do so, so that there is a great deal more Anglican moral instruction going on in practice than can ever be proved from formal episcopal and synodical pronouncements. Sermons, rather than pronouncements, are the place where such teaching is found; and this invites a contrast with the Roman Catholic preference for putting the church's view on record. A similar caution affects the content of Anglican statements on matters where, despite a high degree of moral certainty, there are ongoing scientific and philosophical questions which need to be kept open. Thus, for example, the rather forthright Roman catholic condemnations of abortion from conception on are compatible with a theoretical agnosticism about the "ensoulment" of the early conceptus. For Anglicans this element of philosophical uncertainty tends to produce a much more guardedly-phrased judgement, though the moral conviction among Anglicans in general may be quite as strong.

- 2) After about 1700, the tradition of casuistry, common to both Catholics and Protestants in the preceding century fell out of favour in the Protestant world. The detailed analysis of particular cases seemed to make moral judgment a highly complex affair and to obscure the primacy of the good motive. In their desire for greater simplicity, Protestants often favoured a radical appeal to a single architectonic moral principle, sometimes scriptural and sometimes philosophical in provenance. This had the effect that the norms of special ethics assumed a more relative character in Protestant than in Catholic ethics.

The difference made by this kind of development can be exaggerated. In Catholic pastoral practice, especially in the confessional, the subjective motive has always been given its proper weight in the evaluation of human behaviour. Roman Catholic casuistry has to be understood in the context of a distinction between public teaching of moral principles and the application of this teaching to the situation of the particular person. Moreover Protestants have often been loud and clear in their statements about the rights and wrongs of specific forms of human behaviour.

One effect of casuistry that is to be noted in this context is that it made Christian ethics look very much like an affair that concerns only the individual and God. It has tended to obscure a community understanding of the Christian ethos. This is a dimension of Christian ethics that Catholics and Protestants are both very much rediscovering today.

There are further aspects of the greater store set by Catholics on specific moral norms that should be noted. In the Catholic context the moral order has been presented much more than in the Protestant setting in terms of an analogy with the legal order: moral norms as detailing God's law. But this is an analogy and it is one that has figured in Anglican moral theology as well. Similarly Catholic moral theology and Anglican moral theology have been set up against one another on the grounds that the former has moral absolutes while the latter does not. But this is an assumption that is generally unexamined and which requires careful study of concepts and practice if it is to be proved or refuted. Both Catholics and Anglicans, moreover, have been influenced by the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas on prudent judgement.

- 3) A very important factor in the independent development of Catholic and Anglican moral theology is to do with the question of the sacrament of penance. The Council of Trent standardised the practice of penance, and its provision profoundly affected the development of Catholic moral

theology. Moreover, the practice of sacramental penance has been a vital feature of the Catholic Church's ministry. In the Anglican context, the use of the confessional has never been widespread. The effect of this has been that for Anglicans moral self-examination has taken place in the context of the individual's response to the teaching and preaching he has heard. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, have expected precise direction from their confessors.

In the Catholic context the sacrament of penance has been closely related to the eucharist, preparing and predisposing the individual for the reception of communion. But when noting this, it must be remembered that from the beginning, Anglicans have insisted on the connection between self-examination and the approach to communion, and have offered pastoral help to every believer who needs it. Such self-examination has of course its counterpart in Roman Catholic moral theology which has always been strong on the importance of individual conscience. Indeed, this is an emphasis which Reformed and Anglican writers learned from Catholic sources in the 17th century.

- 4) Roman Catholics and Anglicans have both appealed to Scripture in their moral thinking, but Anglicans have done so more directly. In the Catholic context the principles of Natural Law have been used extensively both to corroborate and to mediate scriptural teaching.

Even in the 17th century, however, Protestant moralists saw the Catholic tradition as sufficiently grounded in Scripture to allow them to make extensive borrowings from its material. In our own time the Scripture-revival within Catholic theology and the growing hermeneutical reflectiveness among Protestant theologians have allowed us to seek together a moral theology which is authentically scriptural without being mechanically so.

Similarly, with regard to Natural Law, Anglicans as well as Catholics have operated within the framework of the western Natural Law Tradition. Both have a strong respect for and dependence on the findings

of human reason. But Anglicans have always been much more eclectic in their use of rational principles, and less committed to particular concepts for defining the Christian ethos or for categorising human behaviour.

- 5) Differences of emphasis have arisen between our moral traditions, in part because we have developed in different cultural settings, in different geographical locations and social, political and economic circumstances. Those differences arise not only between our Churches but within them, for the settings in which Christians live vary considerably, both from place to place and from time to time. One only has to study the history of particular moral questions such as the just war tradition, the teaching on capital punishment or lending at interest to see that this is so across time and one only has to keep abreast of developments in theology to be made aware of the extent to which it develops in response to circumstances which prevail in different places at any one time. Witness the rise of liberation theology in Latin America, the pastoral responses to polygamy in Africa and Asia and the development of Christian economic thought as it responds to problems arising in capitalist and Marxist economics. Developments within one local Church can meet with resistance in another unless allowance is made for differences of context. These problems of assimilation and modification of new ideas have always been with us and always will be. The question that arises for us is about knowing when differences of emphasis occasioned by differences of context go beyond the acceptable limits of diversity and become real obstacles to communion.

It can be agreed that a common mind does not mean rigid uniformity. Within the Christian communion there is room for considerable diversity, indeed diversity is a positive enrichment, it is a mark of catholicity. It is not always easy to see when a difference of practice or teaching has gone beyond the limits of what can be tolerated. A spirit of openness and a passion for unity are necessary qua-

lities in one who hopes to have sound discernment in such matters. Before condemning the practice or teaching of another Church, or of a group within one's own Church, one must ask what lies behind it, what values does it seek to secure, for the Churches cannot respond always and everywhere in the same way. St. Paul's response to slavery cannot be ours today, for circumstances have changed, but he and we sought to live by the same Gospel.

The fact is that each local Church must interpret and formulate the demands of the gospel for its own situation. Every local Church must, for example, engage in a serious search for social justice; every Church must endeavour to support marriage and family life. These things they must do within changing situations. As they do, there will be a constant interplay between theory and praxis. Praxis will generate new questions, new insights will emerge; new approaches will be tried, and so on. The churches will impose different disciplines on their members at different times and in different places, nor should they be accused of inconsistency when they do so.

Aware that these things are true within our two communions, we need not necessarily find fault when we find that another communion differs from our own in its moral discipline. Although they have not developed in complete isolation from each other, Anglican and Roman Catholic moral teachings have each developed in their own context. It is true that both communions in fact exist in a number of different cultures and situations, but, nonetheless, it is possible to risk a few very general remarks about characteristics, distinctive of each, taken as a whole.

Much of the formative Anglican development took place within the Anglo-Saxon world. Anglicanism showed a predisposition to look favourably on democratising and secularising social developments and on technological developments. Roman Catholicism was more negatively disposed to many of these developments. Various factors contributed

to this difference. One was that modernising movements were often loud in their rejection of all that was mediaeval. Protestantism naturally was more in sympathy with this than Catholicism for it had rejected many practices of the mediaeval Church. Roman Catholicism was concerned to maintain continuity with the mediaeval church. Whereas Protestantism was more ready to accept new developments, Catholicism always felt a duty to stand in judgment over them before doing so. More recently Protestantism is finding it necessary to look with a more critical eye at social and cultural developments, while Roman Catholicism has undergone an aggiornamento, making it much more favourably disposed to modernity.

The relationship between the secular professions and the discipline of moral theology differed too, Anglican teaching being more ready to let them chart their own courses, while Roman Catholic theologians felt the need to scrutinize each new development in the light of moral tradition. This was particularly true of the medical profession, as witnessed by the much greater attention given to medical ethics by Roman Catholic theologians than Anglican. A sense of the autonomy of the secular sphere, for complex reasons, developed more strongly in Anglicanism. Differences of emphasis and discipline in regard to marriage may be attributable to a different apportionment of jurisdiction over marriage between the churches and the secular arm in Protestant and Catholic countries.

The two churches have, then, sought to live out the requirements of the gospel in different contexts. This has led to differences of emphasis and discipline. As we have seen, these are inevitable both within and between churches which are widespread geographically. One should not be too ready to see genuine obstacles to communion in what may more justly be considered legitimate diversity. A church should only conclude that a difference it finds in another has gone beyond what is legitimate when, after long and serious reflection, it sees

the other's position as being in conflict with the values of the Gospel. It is not our belief that this is the case between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.

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In all these ways, there has developed both between and within our communions, a series of contrasting tendencies; but these contrasts are inescapable in the moral life of any Church which intends to think dynamically from apostolic reasoning to explore and interpret the new questions that we face. They do not constitute substantial differences in ethics, but differences in emphasis which are properly seen as complementary. What each of our two communions has to teach the other about moral thinking is something which the other, somewhere within its own tradition, has already recognized.

What, then, are we to make of the two points on which there are definite disagreements: the indissolubility of marriage, and the use of artificial contraception? With regard to the former, we note first that the difficulty it poses is no greater in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations than in Orthodox-Roman Catholic relations. It may even be less in that the Anglican tradition, in common with other Protestant thought, permits the Church to play no role in legitimising or granting of divorce, but only goes so far as to recognise in some cases that a marriage no longer exists. (A variety of Anglican practice and theory complicates the matter somewhat, but a rough generalisation might be that Anglicans recognise divorce de facto and not de jure.) In the second place the Anglican churches have always believed, with the Catholic tradition, that lifelong permanence was an essential determinant of the marriage-covenant, and that divorce could not be an option on the horizon of any married couple. Disagreement touches only the way in which we understand the phenomenon of the failure of marriage,

In the third place Roman Catholic pastoral policy, through the use it makes of the concept of nullity, has also sought ways of expressing the judgment that a prima facie marriage may turn out in actuality to be a non-marriage, and so has its own understanding and insight into the contradictions with which the tragedy of weakened marriage in our time daily presents us.

Pastoral discipline has developed in both our communions; and in both our communions there is acknowledgment of a need for yet more development. Our pastoral goals are clearly the same: to strengthen marriages that exist, to heighten the responsibility with which new marriages are undertaken and to minister discerningly and sensitively to those whose marriages have actually failed and who have remarried, with or without the Church's blessing. In this context our disagreement, in itself not extensive, does not seem to hinder the firm mutual confidence in the Christian authenticity of what we are each attempting to do in this sphere, and we may reasonably hope for continued convergence of view.

With regard to the second, the contrary judgments on artificial contraception given by the Lambeth Conference and Pius XI in 1930, it is too early yet to say how major a disagreement this may be. On the one hand, pastoral casuistry on the Roman Catholic side has tried to apply the condemnation in a way that comes to grips sensitively with the dilemmas of those who intend to be responsible parents in the modern world. On the other hand, it is now possible, as it was not in 1930 or even in 1968, to set artificial conception within a wider context of the technological invasion of human intimacy, so that even those who reject the condemnation can often identify themselves with the concern, and aspects of the reasoning, that lay behind it. In this situation there is the possibility of a fruitful dialogue on Christian responsibilities in procreation, which could proceed with the hope of yielding strong common affirmations, in the light of which this disagreement might appear in a new light.

To this generally optimistic conclusion, however, we think it appropriate to add two recommendations, aware that perceived difference, even where the perceptions are exaggerated, can all too easily lead to real differences. The first is that wherever possible national hierarchies and national churches should seek to build an element of ecumenical co-operation into their routine studies and pronouncements on moral and social issues. This step, anticipated in a recommendation of the Malta Report (§ 14), has been taken only occasionally and sporadically to the best of our knowledge. Isolated examples have come to our attention in which a participant from one of our two communions has been invited to engage in the studies of the other, and we think that this occasional practice should become a matter of course. Where appropriate, studies should be conducted entirely on a common basis.

A second recommendation concerns the discussion of moral and social issues within each communion, bearing in mind the anxieties that can arise from inter-continental differences. We hope that our two churches will each examine the processes of consultation that link the national church or hierarchy with the worldwide communion and ask whether they are equipped to give the necessary assistance to the formation of moral guidance, so that the two ends of worldwide unity in Christian moral understanding and of local responsibility for discernment and decision are equally well served.
