

Presbyterian & Reformed, 1975.

9. op cit pl2
10. Selected Shorter Writings Vol.1, p416.
11. Selected Shorter Writings Vol.2, pp478f.

## A R C I C

THE FINAL REPORT of the Anglican-Roman Catholic  
International Commission  
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A Review-Article by Rev Graham Harrison MA BLitt  
(Newport)

Mr Harrison is Minister of Emmanuel Evangelical Church (Baptist), Newport, Gwent and also Tutor in Christian Doctrine at the London Theological Seminary.

IN MARCH 1966 the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsay, met with Pope Paul VI in Rome. One of the outcomes of their meeting was a decision to set up an Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission. ARCIC (the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission)

is the heir and successor of that ecumenical initiative. It met a number of times between January 1970 and September 1981. The Final Report brings together in convenient form the series of Statements and Elucidations thereof issued by ARCIC as the result of its deliberations during that period. It was published last year amidst the euphoria being built up around the visit of Pope John Paul II to Britain. True, there was evidence of delaying tactics, not to say disapproval, on the part of the more conservative elements in the Vatican. But its publication was hailed widely as signifying an agreement in principle to the not-too-ultimate reunification of the Church of England and the Church of Rome. Only a few years ago such a possibility would have been dismissed as idle Anglo-Catholic day-dreams. But now, so it seems, Rome and Canterbury can see more than a glimmer of light at the end of their particular ecumenical tunnel. Certainly the Report sounds at times like those peculiar cooing noises made by starry-eyed lovers in the early stages of the great romance. If only the Holy Father would give his unequivocal consent to a real marriage instead of a protracted courtship Canterbury would be waiting at the altar eager for the nuptials to commence.

Before we consider the Report (referred to subsequently by its now commonly recognised abbreviation ARCIC) in detail, certain points of a more general nature should be made.

1. He who expects little shall not be disappointed.

2. The Commission was composed of an equal number of Anglican and Roman Catholic delegates plus various Consultants, Secretaries and a WCC Observer. Of the nine Anglican delegates, one lays claim to the description 'Evangelical'. Sad to say, there are no indications of a positive nature that he had any significant influence on the course taken by the Commission. It may be that bad as things are they would have been a thousand times worse without his presence. But that would be a judgement of charity and an argument from silence. Certainly ARCIC displays no evidence of pungent and incisive criticisms from an evangelical perspective. At no point is there a minority dissenting voice raised, and we are told almost ad nauseam that ARCIC received the unanimous approval of all members of the Commission. Some evangelical Anglican commentators (eg. Roger Beckwith and Gerald Bray) have offered some radical criticisms of ARCIC, but none of the 'big guns' has fired. It is a sad reflection on how far Anglican evangelicalism has drifted from its previous moorings. Indeed, Dr Bray's suggestion that perhaps the evangelical Anglican Delegate would be better suited to parish work than to the role of evangelical flag-bearer in high-powered theological discussions has brought a veritable deluge of wrath and indignation upon his head.

3. Then there is the habit, beloved by ecumenical commissions of all shapes and sizes, of dignifying their arguments by transliterating rather than translating certain words that they then proceed to use profusely. The two particularly in question here are koinonia and episcopate. The reviewer lost count of the number of times these terms are used. One asks, Why? The effect is to put the argument into the realm of the slightly mysterious. The terms are never precisely (or, for that matter, imprecisely) defined, but they become the verbal keys that unlock all sorts of doors. Or, to change the metaphor, they become the two notes that are sounded to silence all opposition. It is almost as if ARCIC's rubric contained advice to the effect that whenever they sensed their argument to be flagging they should use either episcopate or koinonia, or, better still, both. For example, when arguing for the Primacy of the Roman see, ARCIC says, "... visible unity requires the realisation of a "general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of episcopate" in ther service of the universal

"koinonia of the churches" (p77). A verbal smokescreen if ever there was one!

4. More disturbing than this trick of the ecumenical trade is the difficulty that arises in seeking to answer the question, Just what is ARCIC saying? That it is saying more than any self-respecting, biblically alert, evangelical Anglican would agree to in any 'Agreed Statement' with Rome should be plain for all to see - as we shall endeavour to show. But to pin it down to precise statements and definitions is exceedingly difficult. It bears at times an uncanny resemblance to soap in the bath. When you think you have it, you don't! And the more firmly you clasp it the more slippery and elusive it seems to become!

5. One other matter of a preliminary nature should disturb any evangelical Anglican reading ARCIC. It is the fact that the whole ethos of the discussion is catholic - and by that we mean Roman Catholic. Its terminology, its conceptual framework, its assumptions about Rome, etc., - all breathe forth this atmosphere. Nowhere - and that is not an exaggeration - is there to be found a virile statement that is pressed home in the way it should be of, say, the strictures passed by the Reformers on the Church of Rome. That, evidently, was an historical interlude played out by ignorant men who were but children of their age. But now the time for such theological antics is past. Or, to put it plainly, the Reformation might as well never have happened so far as ARCIC is concerned. The Reformers' criticisms of Rome were of a transient nature and, in any case, were concerned with a passing aberration in the long and varied history of 'the Church'. Of course, this is one of the most common pieces of contemporary wisdom on the ecumenical scene. The pity is that its assumption is so complete as not to need explicit notice. It was the great message of the Pope's visit. The media and the vast majority of welcoming 'Protestants' obviously looked upon the whole episode as the visit to these shores of the human head of the church. To query this was, as some of us discovered, to be consigned to outer darkness where, in the company of Ian Paisley and his ilk, we could gnash our bigotted teeth! Such at least was the impression given.

Finally by way of preamble let it be noted that there are several points at which one can only conclude that the Commission has taken leave of its historical senses. Take just one instance. '... the Commission sees (the Primacy of the see of Rome) as a necessary link

between all those exercising episcopate within the koinonia' (the reader will pardon the language, but we are quoting) 'All ministers of the Gospel ... need to be united in the apostolic faith. Primacy, as a focus within the koinonia, is an assurance that what they teach and do is in accordance with the faith of the apostles.' (p7). How are we to understand such an assertion? Plainly, it is historical nonsense. Is it then the language of pious optimism (ie. how we would like things to be in an ideal world)? If so, how does it relate to the real world in which even ARCIC lives? Was there nobody on the Commission with the logical, not to say theological, sense to query such nonsense? But let us come to the substance of the Report itself.

### Introduction

The opening paragraph of the Introduction is revealing. 'Many bonds still unite us: we confess the same faith in the one true God; we have received the same Spirit; we have been baptized with the same baptism; and we preach the same Christ.' (p5) - question-begging assumptions if ever there were.

They go on to indicate that they will seek to deal with three areas of controversy between Rome and Canterbury: (i) the Eucharist, (ii) the meaning and function of the ordained ministry, and (iii) the nature and exercise of authority in the Church. These issues constitute the substance of the chapters that follow. It is their unanimous and considered conclusion that 'substantive agreement on these decisive issues is now possible' (p5). Historically, and one might argue, theologically, to limit the matter thus is to be guilty of the most grave omissions. Why, for instance, is there no treatment of justification by grace alone and through faith alone? Justification's only (and then it is a passing) reference comes in the Introduction (p8). Even there it is a non-theological use of the term, judged at least by New Testament usage.

### Eucharistic Doctrine

Let us now turn to the first of the three great issues on which they focus their discussion - Eucharistic Doctrine. Their thoughts on this comprise 'The Statement (1971)' and 'Elucidation (1979)'. They state that 'we have reached agreement on essential points of eucharistic doctrine ... nothing essential has been omitted' (p11). What then do they say?

To begin with there is the unspoken but inherent assumption of the supreme importance of the eucharist. That, we would have thought, is something that needs to be proved before it can be assumed - but we cannot stay with that point. More significant is the fact that by a neat terminological sleight of hand they convey the impression that whatever term we use we are all talking about the same thing. 'Eucharist' ('the most universally accepted term') is the preferred description, but 'various names have become customary as descriptions of the eucharist: Lord's Supper, liturgy, holy mysteries, synaxis, mass, holy communion' (p12).

Is not this to beg the question? Can you, for example, read for 'the Lord's Supper', 'the mass', and simply account for the terminological difference in terms of your ecclesiastical cultural environment? (Actually, it is one of their techniques not to use 'the mass' as a term, although its substance is spelled out in some detail). They invoke the notion of memorial (anamnesis) as opening the way to a clearer understanding of the relationship between Christ's sacrifice and the eucharist. But if you know anything about the theological stable from which this comes you will not be deceived. They continue, 'in the eucharistic prayer the church continues to make a perpetual memorial of Christ's death, and his members ... enter into the movement of his self-offering' (p14). 'It is the same Lord who ... through his minister presides at that table, and who gives himself sacramentally in the body and blood of his paschal sacrifice ... Christ's body and blood become really present and are really given' (p15). 'Before the eucharistic prayer, to the question: "What is that?", the believer answers: "It is bread". After the eucharistic prayer, to the same question he answers: "It is truly the body of Christ, the Bread of Life"' (p21).

Is this New Testament sacramental theology? Surely at this point Calvin is a safer and more biblical guide: 'He has given us a Table at which to feast, not an altar upon which to offer a victim; he has not consecrated priests to offer sacrifice, but ministers to distribute the sacred banquet' (Institutes, IV.xviii.12). Such language is plain and its thrust unequivocally scriptural. Not so the language of the so-called Elucidation in which they deal with the questions of the 'movement' in the sacrament, reservation and adoration. They end with what is surely one of the most glaring self-contradictions of all that they utilize. 'Differences of theology and practice may well co-exist with a real consensus on the essentials of eucharistic faith - as in fact

they do within each of our communions' (p24, our underlining). It would seem that in the strange logic of ecumenese there exists no law of contradiction (ie. A is not non-A). For only on such an assumption can 'sense' be made of such a statement - unless 'theology' and 'faith' exist in two separate water-tight compartments in the minds of ARCIC!

### Ministry and Ordination

'Ministry and Ordination' are the themes of the next 'Statement (1973)' and its 'Elucidation (1979)'. Anyone familiar with Anglican-Roman Catholic polemics of a former generation will know that this covers contentious ground. But relax. Once again, all is sweet reasonableness. Everybody agrees with the resultant statement which does the impossible and bridges the uncrossable. Of course, it is all done by verbal magic that uses such words as 'priest', 'sacrifice', 'episcope', but never bothers to define them.

Now it is interesting to observe how the Commission slides over the first, and to our mind calamitous, gap in their argument, viz. the leap of faith involved in the transition from the church-order of the New Testament to the three-fold order of bishops, priests and deacons which both Roman Catholic and Anglican maintain to be absolutely necessary. Wisely - at least from a historical point of view - they make no attempt to ground the three-fold ministry in the New Testament. They speak of a 'considerable diversity in the structure of pastoral ministry' in the New Testament (p32). 'The terms "bishop" and "presbyter" could be applied to the same men or to men with identical or very similar functions.' (ibid). There follows a passage that at once shows both the 'catholic' cast of thought of the Commission and its ecclesiastical arrogance: 'Just as the formation of the canon of the New Testament was a process incomplete until the second half of the second century, so also the full emergence of the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon required a longer period than the apostolic age. Thereafter this threefold structure became universal in the Church.' (ibid, our underlining). The parallel they draw exists only in the grammatical structure of the sentence they have composed. It most certainly is absent from any presumed theological justification of the threefold ministry. The Church recognized, but did not create, canonicity, whereas the threefold ministry is quite simply the creation of the Church.

But just what is 'the Ordained Ministry'? Here again they begin with

a preamble that is really a smokescreen of verbiage which speaks of 'the priesthood of all the faithful' (p33) which the ordained ministry serves. However, lest the unwary presume that this is the only priesthood shared by the ordained ministry ARCIC explicitly states: '...their ministry is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit' (p36). Ordination thus becomes a 'sacramental act' (p37) qualifying the priest to preside at 'the central act of worship, the eucharist ...' (p35) and to pronounce absolution (p34).

Ignatius is as far back as they can get in their proof of this. But even an unbiased observer might be pardoned for thinking that Ignatius was the original episcopal axe-grinder with a vested interest in winning the case he was arguing. They round off their case with a re-affirmation of the myth of apostolic succession - 'the historical continuity of this church with the apostolic Church and of its bishop with the original apostolic ministry' (p38).

Their Elucidation which ostensibly is a response to certain criticisms of their Statement merely compounds the already existing errors and resorts to confusion and ambiguity rather than giving straightforward answers to simple criticisms. For example, when responding to criticism of their treatment of the origins of the ordained ministry they write: 'while the evidence leaves ground for differences of interpretation, it is enough for our purpose to recall that, from the beginning of the Christian Church, there existed episcope in the community, however its various responsibilities were distributed and described, and whatever the names given to those who exercise it' (p42f). The logical consequence of this would surely be to say that the threefold ministry can be held to be only one of several legitimate options. But not so. As everyone knows, incorporation into this threefold ministry by episcopal ordination is the sine qua non for ministerial recognition by both Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. When, we wonder, will we have a contemporary Anglican evangelical of the calibre of the late Alan Stibbs affirming loud and clear that it matters not what the Fathers thought and said but what they should have thought and should have said?

### Authority in the Church

The final part of the Commission's work concerned 'Authority in the Church'. Their conclusions find expression in two Statements, 'I (1976

with an Elucidation, 1981)' and 'II (1981)'.

In this whole section the Commission bears a marked resemblance to one of those circus acts in which a rider stands astride two galloping steeds and skilfully guides them around the ring to the rapturous wonder of children who marvel that such feats are possible to mere mortals. The names of the steeds in question are 'Papal Supremacy' and 'Collegiality' (otherwise known as 'Conciliarity'). ARCIC manfully does its best but the steeds are not well balanced. Predictably, koinonia and episcopate are summoned to help out - but to little avail.

It is in this section that the concept (although not the word) of hierarchy emerges most clearly. '... pastoral authority belongs primarily to the bishop' (p54). 'The unity of local communities under one bishop constitutes what is commonly meant in our two communions by 'a local church' ... The bishop expresses this unity of his church ...' (p55). The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) is used as the justification of post-apostolic gatherings by which '... the Church ... formulates its rule of faith and orders its life ... decisions are authoritative when they express the common faith and mind of the Church' (p56). From this emerges the supremacy of 'bishops of prominent sees' and this leads on to the 'importance of the bishop of Rome among his brother bishops, as explained by the analogy with the position of Peter among the apostles, (which) was interpreted as Christ's will for his Church' (p57).

At this point surely it would have been appropriate for ARCIC to have asked the question, 'Was this historical development right or wrong?' But divine sanction of the development is assumed and we are hastened on to the incredible statement: '... the primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his oversight in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and one another' (p58). To hold a Bible in one hand and a history book in the other should be sufficient answer to such nonsense.

The Statement next moves on to the (for them) vexed question of the relationship between Scripture and tradition and the respective authority to be attributed to each. Conciliar definitions are elevated. Thus local councils gave to the Church a canon. (We were tempted to ask at this point, Did it include the Apocrypha?). Acts 15:28, 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us', is lifted from the Council of Jerusalem and applied to conciliar definitions. They then point out that

in the course of historical development decisions had to receive the approbation of the Roman see. 'By their agreement or disagreement the local church of Rome and its bishop fulfilled their responsibility towards other local churches and their bishops for maintaining the whole Church in the truth' (p61). Curiouser and curiouser! Who gave that church that responsibility more than any other church? But nobody seems to have asked the question. Nor, seemingly, did anybody query the apparent equality of authority underlying the following statement: 'In both our traditions the appeal to Scripture, to the creeds, to the Fathers, and to the definitions of the councils of the early Church is regarded as basic and normative' (p61). Is Scripture supreme, indeed, unique in its authority? Then why not say so? Silence is eloquence on a point like this. The reason, of course, is that ARCIC has not moved basically from the Tridentine equating of tradition and Scripture as parallel sources of authority in and for the church.

This matter leads on to an initial consideration of Papal supremacy (or 'universal primacy' as their jargon has it). Their argument for it is surprisingly weak: 'The only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such episcopate is the see of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died' (p64). On that basis the bishop of Jerusalem would have a prior claim, for his was the city where Jesus died! They do not place great emphasis on the so-called Petrine texts (Mt.16:18f; Lk.22:31f; Jn.21:15-17). Of course, they do not need them since their argument no longer depends upon them. Even Vatican I's use of the phrase "'divine right" of the successors of Peter' need cause no difficulty. 'If it is understood as affirming that the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome is part of God's design for the universal koinonia then it need not be a matter of disagreement' (p65). Where was the alleged Anglican evangelical, we wonder, when such a statement was assented to?

An interesting and crucial example of ARCIC's dexterity in appearing to address itself at a profound level to contentious issues, while in reality saying nothing at all, but doing so in a complicated and obscure way, is its treatment of Papal infallibility. They say that Anglicans find 'grave difficulty' in the concept. However, we are assured that even Vatican I hedged the doctrine about with 'very rigorous conditions (that) preclude the idea that the pope is an inspired oracle communicating fresh revelation, or that he can speak independently of his fellow bishops and the Church, or on matters not concerning faith or morals' (p65). Apparently, all that he does is to

express the mind of the Church on issues concerning divine revelation. A footnote refers to the fact that 'infallibility' is a technical term which does not bear precisely the same meaning as the word does in common usage. They refer you back to two earlier paragraphs which supposedly illustrate this and thus bring you nearer a definition. All that these say is that doctrinal definitions do not exclude subsequent restatement and that the Church can make judgments faithful to Scripture and consistent with tradition respecting the formulation of the central truths of salvation. Not exactly clarification, as we think you will agree. But what then of the decree of infallibility itself, or those of the Immaculate Conception and Bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary? Where in Scripture are they found? Answer, nowhere. Thus they must, if they be true, have come as the result of some post-Scriptural revelation. Are they true or false? And how do you decide such a question? The verbiage breaks down, and for all the protestations of ARCIC the position is exactly what it was before the Commission ever set about trying to reconcile two irreconcilables.

The 1981 Elucidation is no help to them. This speaks of the New Testament writings as only the 'primary norm for Christian faith and life' (p69). The Scriptures are a 'witness to divine revelation'. Tradition is concerned with 'the growth of the seed of God's word from age to age' (p71) - which sounds strangely like Newman's doctrine of development re-vamped for twentieth century ears.

The final and in many ways the most significant section of the Report is the 1981 Statement 'Authority in the Church II'. This was the document that was published shortly before the Pope's visit and that was hailed by many as indicating that the hatchet had finally been buried and the way smoothed for eventual re-unification of the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions. In it ARCIC endeavours to grapple with four outstanding problems related to the question of primacy. Five years' further study, so we are told, have enabled the Commission to present a fresh appraisal of the weight and implications of these four difficulties. The difficulties in question are: 'the interpretation of the Petrine texts, the meaning of the language of "divine right", the affirmation of papal infallibility, and the nature of the jurisdiction ascribed to the bishop of Rome as universal primate' (p81). We shall now consider their findings briefly in that order. It goes without saying that they are of crucial importance for the claims of Rome.

Their treatment of the so-called Petrine texts is interesting. To some

it might even be surprising. They affirm (what can hardly be denied) that Peter seems to have occupied a place of unique prominence among the apostles - a position which is not sufficiently explained by what some have described as his impulsiveness and natural impetuosity. They acknowledge that his weakness may have required help or correction. (They do refer to the incident at Antioch when Paul had occasion to rebuke Peter - Gal.2:11-14 - although one must say that they seem to minimize the implications of this incident. The implications are surely pretty devastating so far as claims of papal infallibility are concerned.) They also recognize that the terms applied to Peter in e.g. Mt.16:18f are applied elsewhere to all the apostles (cf. Mt.18:18, Eph. 2:20). All this is only to be expected in the currently fashionable emphasis on collegiality. But even so it is interesting that they are willing thus to sever their claims for papal supremacy from the New Testament. Interesting - but not surprising, for Rome's claims have never by any stretch of the imagination been grounded on biblical evidence. They go on to make further pertinent admissions. 'The New Testament contains no explicit record of a transmission of Peter's leadership; nor is the transmission of apostolic authority in general very clear' (p83). They would have been yet more accurate had they acknowledged that biblical evidence for such transmission is, quite simply, non-existent. But, as anyone familiar with the controversy will know full well, the fact that the New Testament provides no evidence for a claim is no great obstacle in Roman Catholic eyes to its validity.

It comes, therefore, as no great surprise to read a few lines later, '... it is possible 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 it' (p84). In other circles this might be termed having your cake and eating it! Their conclusion is that 'a universal primacy will be needed in a reunited Church and should appropriately be the primacy of the bishop of Rome ...' (p85). There follows the non sequitur, 'In a reunited Church a ministry modelled on the role of Peter will be a sign and safeguard of such unity' (ibid). Why it should prove to be in the future what it has manifestly failed to be in the past was, apparently, not a question that disturbed the equanimity of their thinking!

Jus Divinum is the next question tackled by the Commission. This really concerns the issue of the nature of the authority by which the bishop of Rome lays claim to primacy. Some of us might be tempted to suggest

that they give a misleading answer to a misguided question - a question that assumes what the Scriptures do not allow. But the Church of Rome - and apparently ARCIC - are happy to speak in terms (admittedly nebulous) of this primacy as expressing 'God's purpose for his Church' (p86). It matters not that Scripture makes no provision for such primacy. Apparently, 'Anglican theologians' are happy 'to recognize the development of the Roman primacy as a gift of divine providence - in other words, as an effect of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church' (p87). They conclude that 'the language of divine right used by the First Vatican Council need no longer be seen as a matter of disagreement between us' (p88).

This leads on to the next point, Jurisdiction, which they define as the power or authority necessary for the exercise of an office. They work up the scale of the ecclesiastical hierarchy discussing the different levels of jurisdiction. Eventually they arrive at that of the bishop of Rome which, they tell us, 'is ordinary and immediate (ie. not mediated) because it is inherent in his office' and 'universal ... because it must enable him to serve the unity and harmony of the koinonia as a whole and in each of its parts' (p89). Despite the fact that all this is served up in the language of collegiality and that for a couple of pages the already hard-pressed episcopate and koinonia are called upon to work overtime, the Commission skates around the question that surely it ought to have faced explicitly. The question is, 'What happens when the Pope thinks one way and the collegiate community (however that be conceived) demurs?' As the Papal decree of 1870 put it so clearly, the ex cathedra 'definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not by reason of the consent of the Church' (Pastor Aeternus, ch.4).

The last question to be tackled is that of Infallibility. The Commission asks 'whether there is a special ministerial gift of discerning the truth and of teaching bestowed at crucial times on one person to enable him to speak authoritatively in the name of the Church in order to preserve the people of God in the truth' (p92). On the way to their answer to this question they mention all sorts of qualifications in passing. For example, '... the assent of the faithful is the ultimate indication that the Church's authoritative decision in a matter of faith has been truly preserved from error by the Holy Spirit' (p92). What price then the decree of Infallibility itself? Is it part of the definition of 'the faithful' that they assent to the Church's authoritative decision? In the language of logicians that is known as petitio principii, or, arguing in a circle. Presumably they think that

they avoid this logical trap by means of an old medieval concept that surfaces at this point. Thus when decisive judgments in matters of faith are made by universal councils or by the universal primate what they are doing is 'to articulate, elucidate or define matters of faith which the community believes at least implicitly' (p93 our underlining) We referred earlier to the 'catholic cast of thought' which pervades the whole of this document and here, if we may be pardoned for saying so, is an explicit example of it. Is there such a thing as implicit belief? Or is it, as Calvin and the other Reformers claimed, a figment of the Scholastic imagination? 'It would be the height of absurdity', writes Calvin, 'to label ignorance tempered by humility "faith". For faith consists in the knowledge of God and Christ (Jn.17:3) not in reverence for the church ... As if Scripture does not regularly teach that understanding is joined with faith!' (Institutes, III,ii.3). But it is quite evident that ARCIC at this point is quite happy to move in the orbit of medieval Catholicism: 'The Church's teaching authority is a service to which the faithful look for guidance especially in times of uncertainty' (p94). In other words, believing, not Scripture but the Church, where you cannot see!

They add, 'The Church's teaching is proclaimed because it is true; it is not true simply because it has been proclaimed' (p94). Which sounds fine until you begin to nail it down. Take, for example, any one of the allegedly infallible *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the Pope - let us say, that concerning the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Let us then apply the foregoing assertion to it. We ask, 'Is it the (Catholic) Church's teaching? To which the answer can only be 'Yes'. There follows our second question, 'Is the teaching true?' To which our answer must surely be 'No!' But perhaps even more important is the third question that is begged right throughout the Commission's Statements and Elucidations, 'How do you decide whether or not it is true?' To which there can be but one satisfactory reply, 'To the Word and to the testimony'.

Now to be fair to ARCIC, it does recognize that there are many Anglicans who find difficulty with these Marian dogmas. However, there is a dogged pussy-footedness even about its way of stating this apprehension. It is not reported that these Anglicans conceive these dogmas to be wrong. Rather, it seems to be the fact that 'the Marian definitions ... are the only examples of such (*ex cathedra*) dogmas promulgated by the bishop of Rome apart from a synod since the separation of our two communions' (p95, our underlining). In other words, what ARCIC admits may disturb some is not the possible erroneous nature of

the dogmas, but the procedural blunder (dare we call it?) of the Pope in formulating these dogmas without regard to the blessed principle of collegiality. Christ had a word for it: straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel!

We need not be surprised, therefore, at their sanguine conclusion. That differences between their two churches still remain they readily acknowledge. '... but if any Petrine function and office are exercised in the living Church of which a universal primate is called to serve as a visible focus, then it inheres in his office that he should have both a defined teaching responsibility and appropriate gifts of the Spirit to enable him to discharge it' (p98). But even that way of stating it is a masterpiece of ecumenical diplomacy. 'It inheres in his office that ...' Does that mean that it is the inevitable equipment enjoyed by the incumbent or simply that it is the desirable qualification for aspiring holders of the office? You pay your money and you take your choice. But one thing you must not do - rock the boat by asking awkward and unnecessary questions of the type that Luther and Calvin, yes, and even Anglicans of a former generation were wont to ask.

What can be said in conclusion? First, why was it that the material principle of the Reformation - the doctrine of Justification by Faith - was not dealt with? Indeed, it gets only a passing reference (and that terminologically inexact) in the whole Report. After all, ARCIC was supposed to deal with the major points at issue between the two communions. However much in practice the XXXIX Articles have been relegated to the history shelf so far as the Church of England is concerned, Article XI surely constituted one of the points of head-on collision between Rome and Canterbury when the two fell apart. On these grounds alone the doctrine was surely worthy of consideration.

Second, where oh where is there the least vestige of a trace of an element of respect for evangelical conviction in this Report? We have become used in latter years to the 'crest-of-the-wave' mentality of our evangelical Anglican friends. They are, so they assure us, spawning bishops by the handful and being recognized at long last by the powers that be in the establishment. To what point, we are entitled to ask, if an evangelical (and one of their brightest young things at that) can be party to a Report like this and apparently not find it necessary to bring out a minority statement?

Finally, for all the laudable attempts by ARCIC to face what it reckons

to be the difficulties, and in the facing of them to avoid controversial language that would preserve prejudices rather than lead to enlightenment, it seems to us that the old issues of the Reformation are still crucially relevant: the supreme authority of Scripture; who is a Christian and how does a man become one? What is the Church? And, is the Church of Rome a Church at all? So long as such issues are burked the cause of truth will not be advanced.

## THE FIRSTBORN AND THE PASSOVER

Rev Tom Holland BD (Letchworth)

This article is part of a much longer work by the author which concentrates on the significance of the FIRSTBORN in the Bible. The whole work forms an important and timely contribution to biblical theology in at least five ways:

1. It helps to confirm the Pauline authorship of Colossians particularly with reference to the words, 'the firstborn of every creature' (1:15) which is shown to be a thoroughly Pauline concept.
2. It also shows convincingly that the 'first-born' does not refer to Christ's position in creation but rather to his role in redemption. In this way the misunderstanding of the term by Arians, both ancient and modern, in order to undermine the deity of Christ is exposed.
3. It questions and rejects the long established view that the setting of the New Testament letters is Greek and Roman rather than Hebraic. For this reason the study of the Old Testament is shown to be essential for the understanding of the New Testament.
4. It sheds additional new light on the gospel of John, Romans and Hebrews.
5. It also illuminates and clarifies further the purpose and significance of the Saviour's person