Charles Sherlock

This article traces the path of official dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics on moral life. A Joint Commission on Marriage worked from 1967 to 1975: its findings were welcomed by Lambeth 1978, and taken up in Canada. ARCIC’s Life in Christ (1994) pioneered ecumenical dialogue on ethics, extended ARCIC’s method, and reached a significant level of agreement. Subsequent ARCIC work has deepened the dialogues method, notably in relation to eschatology. But differences over moral life within and between the two traditions since then mean that further work is needed a major task of ARCIC III.

1. Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue: early stages

The ARCIC dialogue arose from the 1966 Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey. Two Joint Commissions were set up: one to prepare recommendations for official dialogue, the other to look at issues surrounding marriage (the presenting pastoral issue). The Joint Preparatory Commission met in 1967. Its ‘Malta Report’ stated, in relation to ethics:

• ‘Joint or parallel statements from our Church leaders’ should be issued ‘on urgent human issues’ (#14); and
• ‘It is hoped that the work of the Joint Commission on Marriage will be promptly initiated and vigorously pursued’ (#16).

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1 Available at: <www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/declarations/docs/common_declaration_1966.cfm>

2 The Malta Report is included with The Final Report, and is available at: <www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/malta_report.cfm>
More significantly, the following recommendation was made, but was not pursued:

• ‘We also recommend joint study of moral theology to determine similarities and differences in our teaching and practice in this field’ (#23).

The major recommendation was the setting up of a Permanent Joint Commission, with two sub-commissions (intercommunion/ecclesiology, and authority): in the event, a single Commission, ARCIC, took up both. Only two decades later was moral theology considered.

ARCIC’s initial Agreed Statements, on Eucharist (1971) and Ministry (1973), make no direct reference to ethics. Authority I (1976), explicating ‘Christian Authority’, does so implicitly:

Since the Lordship of Christ is universal, the community also bears a responsibility towards all mankind (sic), which demands participation in all that promotes the good of society and responsiveness to every form of human need ... This is Christian authority: when Christians so act and speak, men (sic) perceive the authoritative word of Christ (#2).

The Elucidation on Ministry (1979), and Authority II (1981) include nothing of direct relevance to ethics work, though the Elucidation on Authority I (1981) begins to approach this area:

When this responsibility ... requires [a bishop] to declare a person to be in error in respect of doctrine or conduct, even to the point of exclusion ... (#5)

The final paragraph of the Elucidation on the Eucharist (1976), however, includes this note:

There are other important issues, such as the eschatological dimension of the eucharist and its relation to contemporary questions of human liberation and social justice, which we have either not fully developed or not explicitly treated (#10).

This is the first recognition in ARCIC’s published work that its charge to work on disagreements means that what is held in common can be obscured—and how Christians live out their faith is mostly a matter of agreement. The major areas of moral disagreement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics centre around sexuality and marriage: in the 1960s, amid the ‘sexual revolution’, ‘mixed marriages’ could still bring about family division and social exclusion, while Humanae Vitae (1968) drew sharp attention to differences over the use of contraception in marriage (as allowed in Resolution 15 of the 1930
It was thus not surprising that a Joint Commission on Marriage was set up in 1967, alongside the Joint Preparatory Commission which led to ARCIC. In their 1977 Common Declaration, Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan note: ‘We are following attentively the work thus far accomplished by the Joint Commission on the Theology of Marriage and its Application to Mixed Marriages.’ This body’s 1975 Report, however, was its final work—and to that we now turn.


The Report of the Joint Commission on the Theology of Marriage and its Application to Mixed Marriages (its self-chosen title) is quite different to ARCIC statements in its approach. An initial section lays out, meeting by meeting, the work undertaken and Reports issued. After two meetings in 1968, which agreed on ‘three fundamental theological principles’, the Commission became aware that the Instruction Matrimonii Sacramentum of 1966 was under revision in the light of Vatican II. It thus waited for three years for the Letter, issued motu proprio by Paul VI in March 1970, Matrimonia Mixta, before continuing work. From an Anglican perspective this delay raises questions about how far dialogue rests on ‘deep’ agreement rather than response to ecclesial decisions.

The ‘three fundamental theological principles’ are worth citing in full:

i) That Holy Baptism itself confers Christian status and is the indestructible bond of union between all Christians and Christ, and so

3 ‘Where there is clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse (as far as may be necessary) in a life of discipline and self-control lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless in those cases where there is such a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles. The Conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience.’ Voting: for 193; against 67. This Resolution comes in the middle of a dozen Resolutions on ‘The Life and Witness of the Christian Community—Marriage and Sex’.
of Christians with one another. This baptismal unity remains firm despite all ecclesiastical division.

ii) That in Christian marriage the man and the woman themselves make the covenant whereby they enter into marriage as instituted and ordained by God; this new unity, the unity of marriage, is sacramental in virtue of their Christian baptism and is the work of God in Christ.

iii) That this marriage once made possesses a unity given by God to respect which is a primary duty; this duty creates secondary obligations for the Church in both its pastoral and its legislative capacity. One is the obligation to discourage marriages in which the unity would be so strained or so lacking in vitality as to be both a source of danger to the parties themselves and to be a disfigured sign of or defective witness to the unity of Christ with his Church. Another is the obligation to concert its pastoral care and legislative provisions to support the unity of the marriage once it is made and to ensure as best it can that these provisions be not even unwittingly divisive.

The first agreement about baptism is presumed but left unstated in ARCIC’s work. But it is of immense significance, and could well be reaffirmed by ARCIC or IARCCUM, along with analysis of how baptism relates to confirmation (a matter of debate in both traditions). The second statement maintains the western understanding of the ‘ministers’ of marriage, and is careful in speaking of marriage—not just the wedding—as ‘sacramental’, an affirmation which should be acceptable to all Anglicans. Of what marriage is sacramental is not stated at this point, however, but is beautifully filled out in #21, arising from the 1975 meeting:

The sacramental nature of marriage is also affirmed, partly in the moral sense of enduring obligation (sacramentum) expressed in the marriage vow, partly in the sense of sign (signum): a sign to the world of what marriage in the natural order by God’s ordinance is and ought to be; a sign to the world and to the Church of Christ’s irrevocable covenant with the Church and of the mutual love which finds expression between Him and the Church, and which ought to exist between the Church’s members; and a sign to married people, to the world and the Church, that continuance within the covenant is

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4 That Anglicans who join the Ordinariate must be re-confirmed raises confirmation as a communion-dividing matter for the first time.

5 The union between Christ and the Church is a consequence of the Gospel, rather than the Gospel itself, hence Anglican rejection of marriage as a ‘sacrament of the Gospel’ (cf. ARCIC Ministry #11 note 4).
dependent upon the continued forgiving and renewing grace of God; and finally in its being made by Christ into an effective sign of grace when it is celebrated between the baptized. It is from all this, with continuance in the sacramental life of the Church, that Christian marriage takes its specific character and achieves its fulness.

The third statement sets out an important framework for considering how churches respond when things go wrong around marriage. This is a significant statement for those Anglicans who think Rome takes an overly simplistic or ideological stance about marriage breakdown.

The body of the Report falls into three Sections: ‘The Relevant Theology’ (baptism, marriage, law, and the ‘subsistit’ of Lumen Gentium); ‘Defective Marital Situations’ (including an exegesis of the gospel texts from Barnabas Lindars and Henry Wansbrough, and a dated account of Anglican practice); and ‘Mixed Marriages’ (focussed around Roman Catholic requirements for canonical form and the promise relating to children—with an important exegesis of the latter, and positive suggestion for the former: see d) below).

From an Anglican perspective, four points about the Commission’s Report should be noted:

a) Marriage and ‘law’

The different historical and social contexts regarding marriage and ‘law’ in the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions are spelled out in the Joint Commission Report (cf. Life in Christ—two decades later—#52, #102). For Roman Catholics, it is claimed, canon law prevails over all other, whereas in England, canon law has lived alongside common law for centuries, before and after the Reformation. As the national, ‘state’ Church of England spread through its colonies, the legal context may have changed, but the distinction remained (cf. Life in Christ #38–41, 65–66).

The Report sums up the perceived difference in this way: ‘In his (sic) ordinary Christian living the Anglican accepts the authority of the Church as a moral obligation; the sense of their being a law to keep

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6 Lindars and Wansbrough agree ‘that the exception clauses in Matthew are additions to the words of Jesus’ but disagree as to whether Jesus intended his words to be ‘a directive to the disciples which would be normative’ (Wansbrough) or ‘concerned with bringing people face to face with themselves in the reality of the marriage bond when they contemplate divorce and remarriage’ (Lindars).
seldom occurs to him (sic)’ (#25). 7

Of the Roman Catholic it states, ‘Though he (sic) might feel particular Church regulations to be irksome and even in extreme instances to be an abuse of the Church’s authority, he would hardly recognize a general separation of moral obligation from ecclesiastical law such as that described in para. 25(#26).

On marriage being ‘indissoluble’, the Report notes that the Church of England position was the strictest in Christendom for many decades (due initially to the gap in canon law from 1558–1597). The general tendency in modern Anglicanism, however, until the last two decades, has been towards a full indissolubilist position, and resolutions of Lambeth Conferences have declared this unequivocally’ (#42). In my opinion this claim is exaggerated: it would be better put in terms of life-long union being the ‘first order principle’ behind Anglican conviction about marriage, grounded in the teaching of Christ. As Lambeth 1978 stated in Resolution 34, churches bear pastoral responsibility for those for whom ‘no course absolutely consonant’ with this principle may be available. 8

7 No reference is made to Resolution 67 of Lambeth 1908: ‘We desire earnestly to warn members of our Communion against contracting marriages with Roman Catholics under the conditions imposed by modern Roman canon law, especially as these conditions involve the performance of the marriage ceremony without any prayer or invocation of the divine blessing, and also a promise to have their children brought up in a religious system which they cannot themselves accept.’ This was reiterated in Resolution 98 (1948), omitting the clause about no prayer or invocation: see d) below for Resolution 34 (1978).

8 Resolution 4 of 1888, by which time marriage in England and the USA and their colonies was under civil jurisdiction, supports this claim, the only concession to the divorced being that ‘the Conference recommends that the clergy should not be instructed to refuse the sacraments’ to ‘innocent parties’ who have married while their former partner is still living. And Resolution 25 (1908, in reference to ‘native marriages’) supports the claim by implication, as does Resolution 40 (holding, by a vote of 87 to 84, that a church blessing for the marriage of an ‘innocent’ divorced person is ‘undesirable’).

But Resolution 39 (1908), Resolution 67 (1920) and Resolution 11 (1930), in allowing for a married person with a former partner still alive to be in communion, render the Report’s sweeping claim in doubt. Resolutions about marriage from 1958 onwards are less concerned with divorce and more focussed on pastoral responses to polygamy in some nations, and the changes
Finally, the Report notes changes of marriage discipline in the Anglican Provinces of the USA, Canada, NZ and Australia, but gives no details. A tantalizing note is made regarding the Orthodox Churches, with whom Rome is in 'near perfect' communion, yet whose 'marriage discipline includes the practice of re-marriage in church after divorce' (55). Could such a simple recognition be a way forward in relation to the Anglican Communion?

b) Ecclesiology

The Joint Commission Report notes that the Commission was 'soon made aware that behind the differences of practice, both pastoral and juridical, lay deeper problems of theology' (#9). Behind the promise to raise children 'not simply as Christians ... but particularly as Roman Catholics, lay a doctrine of the Church which Roman Catholics cannot abandon and which Anglicans cannot accept.' As a result,

[W]e formally requested that the ecclesiological questions would be undertaken for us by ARCIC, which had within itself greater theological competence than we could command. This request could not be met ... Accordingly, we had to attend to these questions ourselves; and, having attempted them, we were the more convinced that there remained much in them requiring more thorough theological analysis.

Though ARCIC has since considered the key issues in relation to ministry and authority, the root issue of ecclesiology has not yet been fully addressed. It has been raised in ARCIC meetings (e.g. noting the significance of 'subsistit', or in reflecting on Dominus Iesus and the language of 'sister churches') but not in Agreed Statements. Further, as noted above, no reflection on baptism or confirmation is made in ARCIC’s Statements: attending to this may clarify the ecclesiological questions.9 A beginning could be made by ARCIC analysing the 'ecclesiological principles' of Anglicanorum Coetibus (which raise keen questions about its interpretation of Lumen Gentium).

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9 Church as Communion (1990), the Statement most likely to take up this topic, mentions baptism but thrice, including a citation from the 1989 Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, which acknowledges 'our common baptism into Christ'. No discussion of confirmation is made.
Language

Several language issues point to some lack of precision in the Report. As an Anglican, I am happy to read that I belong to a ‘Church’—ARCIC statements are more careful with ecclesial terms, reflecting the differing self-understandings of each dialogue partner. The Report also speaks of ‘re-marriage’, terminology avoided in Life in Christ. More problematically, it continually speaks of ‘mixed marriage’ (following Matrimonia Mixta) though the possibility of using ‘ecumenical’ and ‘inter-Church’ is mentioned in a footnote. More significantly from an Anglican perspective, the Report speaks of ‘Christian marriage’, rather than ‘marriage in Christ’, though it does note the conviction of the Church of England (including its pre-Reformation life) that marriage is grounded in the ‘order of creation, taken by Christ and the Church into the sacramental order’ (#12, and see further below).

In short, the language of this 1975 Report continues to regard marriage between an Anglican and Roman Catholic Christian as a problem, rather than as an ecumenical opportunity—which observation may itself reflect an Anglican bias! What may be discerned from the life of such a married couple about the re-united visible church which is yet to be?

d) 1978 Lambeth Conference, Resolution 34

Fourthly, the 1978 Lambeth Conference Resolution 34 must be noted. While it maintains the general position taken in 1908 and 1948 on the promise required of the non-Roman Catholic parent, it is much ‘softer’ in tone, and its endorsement of the positive suggestion in the 1975 Report is significant.

Resolution 34 (1978): Anglican-Roman Catholic Marriages


In particular we record our gratitude for the general agreement on the theology of Christian marriage there outlined, and especially for the affirmation of the ‘first order principle’ of life-long union (i.e. in the case of a breakdown of marriage). We also welcome the recognition that the differing pastoral practices of our two traditions do in fact recognise and seek to share a common responsibility for those for whom ‘no course absolutely consonant with the first order principle of marriage as a life-long union may be available’.

We also endorse the recommendations of the Commission in respect
of inter-Church marriages:

(i) that, after joint preparation and pastoral care given by both the Anglican and Roman Catholic counsellors concerned, a marriage may validly and lawfully take place before the duly authorised minister of either party, without the necessity of Roman Catholic dispensation;

(ii) that, as an alternative to an affirmation or promise by the Roman Catholic party in respect of the baptism and upbringing of any children, the Roman Catholic parish priest may give a written assurance to his bishop that he has put the Roman Catholic partner in mind of his or her obligations and that the other spouse knows what these are.

We note that there are some variations in different regions in the provisions of Roman Catholic directories on inter-Church marriages. We nevertheless warmly welcome the real attempts of many Roman Catholic episcopal conferences to be pastorally sensitive to those problems arising out of their regulations, which remain an obstacle to the continued growth of fraternal relations between us. In particular, we note a growing Roman Catholic understanding that a decision as to the baptism and upbringing of any children should be made within the unity of the marriage, in which the Christian conscience of both partners must be respected. We urge that this last development be encouraged.

The problems associated with marriage between members of our two Communions continue to hinder inter-Church relations and progress towards unity. While we recognise that there has been an improved situation in some places as a result of the ‘Motu Propio’ [i.e. Matrimonia Mixta], the general principles underlying the Roman Catholic position are unacceptable to Anglicans. Equality of conscience as between partners in respect of all aspects of their marriage (and in particular with regard to the baptism and religious upbringing of children) is something to be affirmed both for its own sake and for the sake of an improved relationship between the Churches.


In 1987, the National Anglican-Roman Catholic Bishops’ Dialogue in Canada issued Pastoral Guidelines which take a more positive line than the Joint Commission Report, signalled for example in the use of ‘Inter-Church’ throughout.10 These Guidelines view such marriages as

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an ecumenical opportunity, and set out 22 Articles covering preparation, procedures, participation and pastoral care.

The Guidelines pay full regard to official church teaching, and include a careful explication of the differing ways in which canon law is interpreted by Anglicans and Roman Catholics. But the substance of the 22 Articles flows from the following theological bases:

Though Anglicans and Roman Catholics who marry have been baptised in different Churches, their union is a true sacrament and gives rise to a ‘domestic church’...

Marriage, as a covenant, builds upon the original baptismal covenant by which the believer is united to Jesus and his Body, the Church. Exercising the priesthood of their baptism-confirmation [Fr: sacerdoce découlant de son baptême et de sa confirmation], each baptized party administers in the name of the Church the sacrament to the other, with its special sacramental grace, which perdures throughout their married life.

These are impressive agreements, building significantly on the 1975 Report, and the Articles reflect considerable wisdom: whether they remain in place, or have been updated, has not been able to be ascertained.

4. Agreed Statements issued by ARCIC, 1985-93

ARCIC was reconstituted after The Final Report: its second stage, before a revision of its membership in 1991, saw two Agreed Statements issued, Salvation and the Church (1985) and Church as Communion (1990). Moral theology and ethics have a clear general relevance to both topics, but are handled indirectly.

a) Salvation and the Church (1985)

Given the Reformation debates over ‘good works’, ethical questions of necessity arise when considering justification and especially sanctification. So we read of the latter, ‘The law of Christ has become the pattern of our life. We are enabled to produce good works which are the fruit of the Holy Spirit’ (#17). The sub-section Salvation and Good Works (#19-24), though focussed on doctrinal issues such as ‘merit’, affirms the significance of ‘righteous’ living in the Christian life, centred on Ephesians 2:8ff (with a footnote to Article X). More positively, the Church is said to be
already here and now a foretaste of God's Kingdom ... a fellowship where, since all are justified by the grace of God, all may learn to do justice to one another; where racial, ethnic, social, sexual and other distinctions no longer cause discrimination and alienation (Gal. 3:28) ... Only a reconciled and reconciling community, faithful to its Lord ... can speak with full integrity to an alienated, divided world, and so be a credible witness to God's saving action in Christ and a foretaste of God's Kingdom (#30).

The following paragraph fills this out ethically in terms of being called to affirm the sacredness and dignity of the person, the value of natural and political communities ... to witness against the structure of sin in society, addressing humanity with the Gospel of repentance and forgiveness and making intercession for the world. It is called to be an agent of justice and compassion (#31).

On this, Anglicans, Roman Catholics and all Christians can agree.

b) Church as Communion (1990)

This Statement does not explore differences between the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions, so much as seek to make explicit the 'communion ecclesiology' which ARCIC took a leading role in developing. In doing so, ethical dimensions of life in Christ are spelled out in more explicit terms than in earlier ARCIC statements.

Church as Communion builds on the final sub-section of Salvation and the Church, which has portrayed the Church as sign of the Gospel (Salvation #26), 'entrusted with a responsibility of stewardship' in 'proclaiming the Gospel by its sacramental and pastoral life' (#27) and 'as instrument for the realisation of God's eternal design, the salvation of humanity' (#28). In sum, the Church 'can be described as sacrament of God's saving work': as such, members' sins, institutional 'shortcomings' and 'the scandal of division' undermine its credibility (#29).

These ethical underpinnings are filled out in Church as Communion's structure of Church as sign/instrument/foretaste and so 'sacrament' motifs, but now with 'the vision of God's reign' in view (#3). Ethical matters are raised in noting that divisions in communion are sin, and ecclesial holiness is seen 'paradoxically' in weakness, suffering and poverty (#21). Members are 'called to give themselves in loving witness and service to their fellow human beings' (#22), and apostolic 'faithfulness must be realised in daily life', while recognizing that 'in every age and culture authentic faithfulness is expressed in new ways and by fresh insights' (#27).
In discussing 'catholicity', human diversity is recognised as positive (#35). However, while this 'is evident in the variety of liturgies and forms of spirituality, in the variety of disciplines and ways of exercising authority, in the variety of theological approaches, and even in the variety of theological expressions of the same doctrine' (#36), nothing is said about possible diversity in ethical responses. And the negative side of diversity is taken up not only in terms of denial or distortion of apostolic faith, but the latter 'is also threatened whenever the faith is obscured by attitudes and behaviours in the Church which are not in accord with its calling to be the holy people of God.' Moreover, 'Catholicity and holiness are also impaired when the Church fails to confront the causes of injustice and oppression which tear humanity apart or when it fails to hear the cries of those calling for sustenance, respect, peace and freedom' (#40).

How then do ethical issues relate to 'what constitutes ecclesial communion'? The description moves from the basics—apostolic faith according to the Scriptures and Creeds, and one baptism—to a rich statement of personal and corporate life:

It is a life of shared concern for one another in mutual forbearance, submission, gentleness and love; in the placing of the interests of others above the interests of self; in making room for each other in the body of Christ; in solidarity with the poor and the powerless; and in the sharing of gifts both materials and spiritual (cf. Acts 2:44). Also constitutive of the life in communion is acceptance of the same basic moral values, the sharing of the same vision of humanity created in the image of God and recreated in Christ, and the common confession of the one hope in the final consummation of the Kingdom of God (#45).

Church as Communion, then, though not concerned to resolve differences, lays groundwork for further exploration of ethical issues. The final sub-section, 'Communion Between Anglicans and Roman Catholics', after noting the ordination of women as an emerging issue, continues:

Another area which the Commission is currently engaged in studying is that of moral issues. Our distinct cultural inheritances have sometimes led us to treat of moral questions in different ways. Our study will explore the moral dimension of Christian life and seek to explain and assess its significance for communion as well as the importance of agreement on particular moral questions (#57).
5. Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church (1994)

Working on moral issues formed the initial agenda for a newly constituted Commission from 1991. The task had commenced earlier, with the co-secretaries and two members meeting in Oxford to draft an outline structured around the differences between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. This was circulated to consultants for comment, and considered at the 1990 Dublin ARCIC meeting: this offered an alternative structure, however, in which differences were placed later, after consideration of what was held in common.

a) Paris 1991

The 1991 Paris meeting began with initial consideration of the Oxford and Dublin schemata. To open discussion between the mostly new Commission members, each tradition was asked to say how they perceived Christians in the other tradition were shaped in their moral life. The Roman Catholics said, ‘Anglicans hear the Ten Commandments at each eucharist’; the Anglicans noted that ‘Catholics are primarily shaped by the confessional’. Both responses drew some chuckles, showing how dated our perceptions can be—an important realisation. Further, issues related to sexuality touch each person individually: the Anglican members were all married (and one divorced), but none of the Roman Catholic members. Conversations outside of the formal meetings opened up important dimensions of reflection which would have been infelicitous in the group as a whole. Also, on a number of occasions the ethical issues related to the just-past 1991 Gulf War were raised—the wider world context cannot be shut out!

Responses to the Oxford and Dublin drafts revolved around three main issues:

i) A strong feeling was expressed by many that the Dublin approach was to be preferred.

ii) A firmer theological grounding was sought, based in a trinitarian understanding of the imago Dei paired with a ‘new creation’ perspective: this drew debate on how ‘natural law’ was to be included. This ethos would come to shape the ethos of the document, typified in

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The co-chairs, co-secretaries, WCC observer and three continuing members were joined by four new Anglican and four new Roman Catholic members, plus consultants Brian Johnstone, Oliver O’Donovan (formerly a member) and Peter Baelz (who would draft Life in Christ).
the Peter Baelz phrase, ‘the patterning power of the Kingdom’.

iii) Several Anglican members insisted on the need to recognise that contraception and divorce must be seen as wider than personal issues. Issues such as these have strong social consequences in ‘third world’ contexts, and the social dimension of sin must not be forgotten.

Considerable time was spent seeking to understand the specific responses of each tradition to divorce and re-marriage (and to a lesser extent, contraception). It became evident that seeking to respond to such issues in separation had shaped divergent approaches, notably the historical and socio-political circumstances of English history. Conversely, the sense of coherence which Roman Catholic members found in the symbol of global communion offered by the Bishop of Rome, alongside the varied approaches to moral theological method in the Roman Catholic tradition, impressed Anglican members.

As well as the 1975 Joint Commission Report and 1987 Pastoral Guidelines noted above, two documents from North American dialogues proved to be helpful: ‘The Experience of Women in Ministry’ (ARC Canada 1983), and ‘Images of God: Reflections on Christian Anthropology’ (ARC-USA 1983).

In sum, the 1991 meeting saw what became Section C of Life in Christ sketched out, Sections D and E commenced, and the ideas in Sections A and F affirmed.

b) Windsor 1992

As work on Life in Christ continued, Commission members increasingly sought a more ‘relational’ than ‘juridical’ approach to moral issues: this would eventually lead to the ‘what sort of persons are we called to be?’ perspective, and agreement that we did indeed share a congruent ‘approach, context and values within which the subject ought to be considered’. On the historical side, detailed consideration of contraception and responses to marriage breakdown led to a growing reticence to spell out all the detail in the Statement. It was agreed that the significance of divergent ecclesial histories must

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12 As well as the main task, working on Life in Christ, the 1992 meeting came after the release of the Vatican’s official response to The Final Report, the CDF Letter, ‘Life in Communion’, both of which were discussed. As well, the impending ordination in the Church of England of women as priests, and the consequent letter from John Paul II to the Archbishop of Canterbury, saw this topic reviewed in an informal session.
be recognised, but the Commission had not been asked to write a moral theology textbook.

In sum, the 1992 meeting saw Section B added and Section E fleshed out, in the midst of reflection on other ecclesiological issues.

From my Anglican perspective, the significant realisation was that, while both traditions employ casuistry, different relationships typically exist between moral norms and their application. For Roman Catholics, the approach is to define ideal norms—moral ‘canons’—and allow the exercise of pastoral prudence to be engaged in their application. Anglicans, on the other hand, typically seek to include prudential matters in their ethical decision-making; the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10 on gay relationships is a good example—cf. Life in Christ #52.

c) Venice 1993

A revised draft of Life in Christ was considered in detail, along with continued reflection on the implications of divided histories. On the Roman Catholic side, the ‘history’ of moral theology was illuminating for Anglican members. Conversely, all members came to appreciate more clearly the doctrinal effect of the Church of England being ‘established’, and its various carry-overs to the colonies (cf. the diverse situations of the West Indies, India, USA, South Africa, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, etc.).

Other important matters were considered at the meeting, most notably agreement to issue Clarifications, but consideration of the ordination of women was deferred in order to finish Life in Christ. One reason for the urgency was that Roman Catholic members had been apprised of a forthcoming encyclical on morals (Veritatis Splendor), though none were involved with its preparation. It was agreed that ARCIC should finish its work before this was published, so that Life in Christ could stand on its own. By the end of the meeting the full statement was able to be read aloud and voted on paragraph by paragraph, as had become ARCIC’s custom, and signed.

d) ’Life in Christ’—some comments

From an Anglican viewpoint, several issues come to mind regarding

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13 Clarifications on Certain Aspects of the Agreed Statements on Eucharist and Ministry of ARCIC together with a letter from Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, President, PCPCU (CTS/Church House, 1994).
**Life in Christ:**

- The desire to think in terms of the 'new creation', a prevailing tone in the Commission's discussion, is coming into increasing prominence in the Anglican Communion. Such an approach can be seen in the structure of *Life in Christ*, placing 'Shared Vision', with its emphasis on hope, before 'Common Heritage'. The emphasis falls on what it means for human existence to be made in the image of the triune God, called to participate in the divine life as 'persons-in-communion', under the 'patterned power of the kingdom'.

  For myself, the most important sentence in the Statement is this: 'The fundamental moral question, therefore, is not 'What ought we to do?', but 'What kind of persons are we called to become?' (#6). But this note would also seem to be whittled away as the document—inevitably—turns to focus on present realities, and continuing differences over 'moral law'. This 'eschatological' viewpoint is a little stronger in the ARCIC's *The Gift of Authority*, and opens into flower in *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ.*

- The discussion of marriage in *Life in Christ* includes careful reflection on 'sacramentality' (#61-62). As is noted, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662) teaches that 'the state of matrimony' had itself been 'adorned and beautified' by Christ's presence at the marriage at Cana (#62). Anglicans thus hold that each marriage—Christian or otherwise—is in some sense 'sacramental', reflecting the grace and love of God in creation and incarnation, and with Roman Catholics (and all Christians) affirm that marriage 'in Christ' signifies the unity between Christ and the Church. Thus 'Anglicans tend to emphasise the breadth of God's grace in creation, while Roman Catholics tend to emphasise the depth of God's grace in Christ. These emphases should be seen as complementary. Ideally, they belong together' (#62). Put another way, Anglicans interpret Christ's presence at Cana as blessing the state of marriage *itself*, rather than forming a precedent for the blessing of particular marriages. Thus it is possible that Anglicans are wary of saying marriage (for everyone) is a 'sacrament' (though not 'of the gospel'),

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and Roman Catholics anxious to assert it (for baptised persons), for almost precisely the same reason—to protect Christian distinctives!

• Of necessity Life in Christ comes to focus on ethical differences between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, viz. some areas of sexual morality. Reading only with this in mind, however, fails to appreciate the exploration of our ‘Shared Vision’ (#4-11) and ‘Common Heritage’ (#12-35), and the significant agreement reached in the midst of divergence, not only as regards divorce (#64-77) and contraception (#78-82)—the documented differences—but also over moral judgement and authority (#36-63). The whole text is pervaded by the conviction that moral life in Christ is to be viewed through the motif of communion: the conclusions reached are grounded in the trinitarian-based notion of humans as ‘persons-in-communion’. And care is taken only to use the word ‘person’ when the individual-in-relationship is in view, and ‘individual’ otherwise (and the latter is much less common than the former).

• The conclusion reached in Life in Christ is not one of ‘substantial agreement’, as in earlier ARCIC Statements, but has a ‘double negative’ character: were the Statement adopted, the differences which remain would not constitute a barrier to communion. This is a significant shift in ARCIC’s method, which has its weaknesses but may be relevant in other areas (cf. the treatment of the Marian dogmas in Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ #63).

• The area in which Life in Christ sees continuing study as especially needed is ‘of the differences between us, real or apparent, in our understanding and use of the notion of ‘law’ (#102). This point, acknowledged a number of times in this paper, has deepened in the past 20 years, as Anglicans have come to diverge in practice regarding marriage after divorce, and now gay relationships, and as debate continues among Roman Catholics as to how moral ‘law’ is applied.

Life in Christ was overshadowed by the issuing of Veritatis Splendor. ARC-USA made an incisive comparison between the two documents, drawing particular attention to the contrast between ARCIC’s question, ‘what sort of persons are we to become?’ (cf. #11), and that of Veritatis Splendor, ‘what ought we to do?’15 This analysis further

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reinforces the need to explore how ‘law’ functions to support ‘morals in communion’.

One concluding observation is that the brief section in *Life in Christ* on homosexuality (#87) would seem to have been ignored in Anglican debates over the last dozen years. The issue of how human nature and well-being is related to our gendered identity is so fundamental that only an ecumenical Christian approach can be sustained in the longer term—which presents both a significant challenge and opportunity for dialogues such as that offered by ARCIC III.

6. Moral theology and ARCIC since *Life in Christ*

a) The Gift of Authority (1999)

The communion-dividing issues around authority are less to do with its nature than its exercise. This is especially the case with the magisterium, in their calling to lead the people of God, and the relationship of this to the authority of Christians to live in obedience and freedom—expressed in the *sensus fidelium*. As such, *The Gift of Authority* contributes to ethics work in terms of how authority is exercised regarding moral issues, which are clearly of current relevance to the Commission. However, while paying careful attention to dogmatic concerns, the Statement does not address directly what weight in ethical matters the *sensus fidelium* may carry (cf. #29—and see #49 on conscience), nor what appropriate obedience may be called for by the ‘ministers of memory’ (cf. #30).

In discussing Anglican structures, it is acknowledged that ‘Houses of Bishops exercise a distinctive and unique ministry in relation to matters of doctrine, worship and moral life’ (#39, italics added). The catechetical teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on morals is well known, and the Bishop of Rome from time to time teaches in these areas through encyclicals (e.g. *Humanae Vitae*, *Veritatis Splendor*), but these are not addressed in the Statement.

In short, while *Life in Christ* ends with a call for Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops to speak together on moral issues facing society, and

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Gift sheds considerable light on Christian authority and its exercise, further work is needed on how this applies to ethics/moral life.

b) Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ (2005)

Issues of moral theology are (perhaps not surprisingly) largely absent from this Statement. The example of Mary’s trust, obedience, holiness and stance for justice are however cited a number of times (cf. #11, #15-16, #20, #25, #30, #37, #51, #59, #64 and especially #74), and are intended to inspire readers to live ethically and so promote deepened communion in Christ.

Yet it is the eschatological motif—in Life in Christ, the ‘patterning power of the Kingdom’—which in Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ becomes the ‘engine room’ and drives its theological method. By seeking to ‘do theology’ from the future backwards rather than just the past forwards, agreement was able to be made as to the substance of the two papal definitions which carry the authority of revelation for Roman Catholics (Mary, Section C).

Such a ‘teleological’ approach may not readily resolve all the issues in discerning how the Spirit is guiding the people of God in living the ‘new creation’ now. Yet—at least from the perspective of the Anglican tradition—it is more likely to show promise of agreement about what constitutes authentic ‘morals in communion’ than a juridical or deontological one. And of crucial importance in this is finding agreement as regards the limits of ethical life in Christ in diverse social/political/cultural contexts, which in this global village world are often heaped on top of one another.