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## Biblical Truth for Today's Church

The Latimer Trust. Registered Charity No. 1084337

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### LATIMER COMMENT 12

#### THE VOTING OF THE DEANERIES AND DIOCESES ON BEM AND ARCIC

The deanery and diocesan synods are currently being invited to give an opinion on three motions passed by the General Synod in February 1985. They are asked to report their opinions back by the end of September 1986, so that the General Synod can then decide whether to confirm its previous decision. An election of the General Synod has taken place in between, so it will not be the same membership which decides this second time, and in any case it will want to pay attention to what the dioceses and deaneries have had to say.

The three motions concern two ecumenical reports on doctrine. The first is Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry ('BEM' for short), finalised at Lima by the Faith and Order Department of the World Council of Churches, and hence sometimes called the 'Lima report'. The other is the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission ('ARCIC for short), though this has turned out to be only semi-final, as a second ARCIC has had to be appointed to carry the work of the first ARCIC further. The Church of England is represented both on the World Council of Churches and on the two ARCICs, and therefore has to decide whether it can accept the reports with which it has been presented. If it is happy with them as statements of its own faith, it will be free to enter into closer relations with the other churches involved, on the basis of this new understanding (provided they are similarly happy).

When the General Synod first considered these three motions, it had the benefit of an elaborate report on the BEM and ARCIC reports, drawn up by its own Faith and Order Advisory Group (FOAG for short) and entitled Towards a Church of England Response to BEM and ARCIC. The motions, in the form in which the General Synod sent them down to the dioceses, contain two references to this third report, as well as to the BEM and ARCIC reports. The motions also refer to different parts of the ARCIC Final Report as 'The Windsor Statement', 'the Canterbury Statement' and 'the Venice Statement'. It needs to be realised that these three statements, and the 'Elucidations' of them, also mentioned, are all parts of the ARCIC Final Report.

The BEM report is available from the British Council of Churches (10 Eaton Gate, London S.W.1) at £1.95, the ARCIC report from the SPCK (Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone Road, London NW1 4DU) at the same price, and the FOAG report from the Church House Bookshop (Great Smith Street, London S. W. 1) at £4.95, plus postage in each case. A short examination of the BEM report is available from Latimer House (address below) for 10p plus s. a. e., and a brief study guide on the ARCIC report from the same source for 40p plus 13p postage.

The first of the three motions runs as follows:

1. 'That this Synod, to the extent described in this report (i. e. the FOAG report), recognizes in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry the faith of the Church throughout the ages'.

It will be noticed that this motion is fairly vague, and is limited to the degree of approval given to BEM by the FOAG report. The FOAG report is not uncritical of BEM, but it expresses its criticisms in a very mild way, and it ought to be said more bluntly that what is written in BEM about the Eucharist is without any clear meaning, and that even if one can recognize 'the faith of the Church throughout the ages' in the other two parts of BEM, as one probably can, one cannot recognize it in the part on the Eucharist. So the motion needs to be amended or rejected.

The second motion is in three parts: 2. 'That this Synod recognizes that:

(a) the Windsor (i. e. ARCIC) Statement on the Eucharist together with its Elucidation (the Final Report pp. 12-25) is consonant in substance with the faith of the Church of England;

(b) the Canterbury (i.e. ARCIC) Statement on Ministry and Ordination together with its Elucidation (the Final Report pp. 30-45) is consonant in substance with the faith of the Church of England and provides a firm basis on which to move towards the reconciliation of the ministries of our two communions;

(c) the Venice (i. e. ARCIC ) Statement on Authority I together with its Elucidation and Authority II (The Final Report pp.52-98) record sufficient convergence on the nature of authority in the Church for our communions together to explore further the structures of authority and the exercise of collegiality and primacy in the Church'.

Part (b) of this second motion is open to the same criticism as motion 1, for no one knows for certain what the ARCIC statement on Ministry and Ordination means. Does it mean that, in practice, the Anglican and Roman churches both call their ministers 'priests', and both have a threefold ministry, with bishops and deacons as well? (This , of course, is undeniably true.) Or does it mean that this is a matter of doctrine as well as practice: that all Christians ought to call their ministers 'priests', and ought to have a threefold ministry? (This , of course, is highly disputable.) Since either of these interpretations is possible, and both have been supported by different members of ARCIC, no one can know whether the statement on Ministry and Ordination is 'consonant in substance with the faith of the Church of England', and it does not provide a 'firm basis 'for anything. Motion 2(b), therefore , needs to be rejected.

Motion 2(a) needs to be rejected for a different reason. The ARCIC statement on the Eucharist is much clearer than that on the Ministry and Ordination, and can therefore be plainly seen not to be 'consonant in substance with the faith of the Church of England'. The historic teaching of the Church of England , as expressed in its Articles and Prayer Book and in its classical theologians such as Richard Hooker, is that the real presence of Christ is not in the bread and wine of the sacrament, but in the hearts of those who worthily receive those elements (i. e. receive them with repentance and faith). The ARCIC statement on the Eucharist, however, wishing to make concessions to the Roman Catholic commitment to transubstantiation, insists that the real presence of Christ is in the elements as well (Final Report, pp. 15-16, 21). Admittedly, this is the faith of the Church of Rome, but it is not the faith of the Church of England, and ought not to be described as such. For all its good points, the statement on the Eucharist is not in agreement with Anglican teaching.

Motion 2(c) is more cautious, recognizing the very partial agreement which ARCIC was able to reach on the subject of authority, and some of the big problems that remain. It therefore only speaks of 'sufficient convergence'<sup>1</sup>, and of the possibility of further exploration of collegiality' (i. e. the collaboration of bishops) and 'primacy' (i.e. the claims of the pope). Whether the convergence is really sufficient for any further exploration to be based upon it is a matter of opinion. Until the question of the authority of Scripture has been more adequately resolved than it has been by ARCIC (pp. 69-71), it seems premature to discuss the authority of the pope, with his claims of infallibility and universal jurisdiction. Finally, Motion 3 runs:

'That this Synod affirms that the Final Report (i. e. of ARCIC) offers a sufficient basis for taking the next concrete steps towards the reconciliation of our Churches (i.e. the Church of England and the Church of Rome) and proposes that such steps should include those listed in paragraph 271 of the Report (i. e. of FOAG).'

By this point, deanery and diocesan synod members may be wondering whether the ARCIC report 'offers a sufficient basis' for any steps at all. However, the steps which paragraph 271 of the FOAG report actually mentions are (1) a degree of 'eucharistic sharing'; (ii) a reconsideration by Rome of the validity of Anglican ordinations (which she has hitherto denied); (iii) a clarification of how we may live together while holding different views on the ordination of women to the priesthood; and (iv) a deepening of the convergence spoken of in motion 2(c). It also mentions (v) joint-meetings of bishops; (vi) the establishing of local covenants; (vii) the sharing of facilities for theological education; and (viii) the alleviation of the difficulties caused by mixed marriages. It is not at all clear what is meant by some of these eight proposals , notably the first and sixth; the second is the business of Rome and not the Church

of England; the fourth is the business of the ARCIC II commission, presumably; the third implies that the Church of England is somehow involved in the decisions of some Anglicans overseas on the ordination of women, although it has taken no such decision itself; and altogether it is a very ill-considered package. Whatever one may think of the remaining points, without very careful amendment motion 3 seems as unacceptable as the other two motions.

In a period when relations with other denominations are so much more friendly than they have often been in the past, it may seem churlish (it certainly feels churlish) to be so critical of the BEM and ARCIC reports. But establishing agreement is a matter in which there can be no cutting of corners. If we pretend now that we are more agreed than we are, it will only lead to recriminations later, and to relations becoming more distant rather than closer. Both in the reports and in the motions a good many corners are cut, and this is the time to say so.

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