

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ANGLICAN AND ROMAN CATHOLIC BILATERAL RELATIONS FROM A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper is a critical examination of Anglican-Roman Catholic bilateral relations from a theological perspective. The main argument of the paper is that while the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches consider themselves to be in a special relationship as a result of a number of theological agreements reached over the past forty years aimed at bringing them closer together than ever before, they are far from achieving visible church unity. The achievements made over the years, in the form of agreed theological texts have, from time to time, been derailed by subtle theological differences between the two church traditions. This can best be described in the words of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin "One step forward, two steps back". The paper concludes that given the small amount of progress, which is pushed back by a large amount of setbacks, church unity is unattainable.

Key words: Ecumenism, theological texts, church unity, bilateral relations, theological perspective

1. Introduction

Ecumenism, that is, the activities to achieve church unity after the 16th Century Protestant Reformation in Germany has been the hallmark of the church in the Twentieth and Twenty First Centuries. Philip Potter, once General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, noted that the ecumenical movement was "the means by which the churches, which form the house, the *oikos* of God, are seeking so live and witness before all peoples that the whole *oikoumene* may become the *oikos* of God through the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the life-giving Spirit."⁷⁰ This is in line with the views of the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) of the Second Vatican Council, according to which "The Church established by Christ the Lord is, indeed, one and unique. Yet many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true heritage of Jesus Christ.... Without doubt this discord openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature".⁷¹

⁷⁰ Philip Potter, "Report of the General Secretary" in Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (eds.), *The ecumenical movement: An Anthology of key texts and voices*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997, p.55.

⁷¹ Walter M. Abbott, S. J., (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966, p.341.

In most cases, the ecumenical movement has taken the shape of multilateral negotiations, but in some instances it has been pursued along bilateral lines in order to achieve and enhance the unity of the divided church. This paper argues that despite making tremendous advances to narrow the gap between the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, subtle theological differences still exist and others come into play, which make the visible unity of the two church traditions almost impossible.

2. The two churches' quest for church unity

In the twentieth century the need for church unity between the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and the Anglican Church on the other began when Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Pope John Paul XXIII met in Rome in 1960. During this visit the Pope suggested to Fisher that the "separated brethren" (Anglicans) should return to the Mother Church to which the Archbishop responded: "Your Holiness, no return. None of us can go backwards. We are now running on parallel courses; we are looking forward until, in God's time, our two courses approximate and meet". After sometime of reflection, the Pope said "You are right"⁷² Mark the Pope's words "return of the separated brethren to the Mother Church". This seems to be the baseline and the ultimate requirement for organic church unity between the Vatican on the one hand and Canterbury on the other regardless of other achievements attained through bilateral ecumenical dialogue.

Interestingly, Archbishop Fisher's visit to Rome generated the idea of establishing an Anglican Centre in Rome which materialized on 14th January 1966.⁷³ It was meant to be a permanent, visible presence of the Anglican Communion in Rome and the base for the Archbishop of Canterbury's personal representative to the Holy See.⁷⁴ This arrangement began to improve the relationship between the two churches which had been so bad since the Reformation. This led to the official visit of Archbishop Michael Ramsey to the Vatican. He was received in the Sistine Chapel by Pope Paul VI on 23rd March, 1966 and on 24th March they prayed together at the Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls where they signed a common declaration to mark a new stage in the development of fraternal relations, based upon Christian charity and sincere efforts to remove the causes of conflict and to re-establish unity. They affirmed their desire that Christians who belong to the two communions should be animated by sentiments of respect, esteem and fraternal love. They also pledged to embark on a serious ecumenical dialogue founded on the gospels and on the ancient common traditions, which would, ultimately, lead to church unity for which Christ prayed. The dialogue would include theological matters such as Scripture, tradition and liturgy as well as matters of practical difficulties felt on either side.⁷⁵

Generally speaking, the beginning of bilateral dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches can be traced back to this event for out of this meeting the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was established in 1967. Its terms of reference

⁷² Frederick Bliss, *Anglicans in Rome: A history*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006, pp. 46-47.

⁷³ Bliss, *Anglicans in Rome*... p.89.

⁷⁴ Bliss, *Anglicans in Rome*..., pp. 94-95.

⁷⁵ Personal communication with the Associate Director Anglican Centre in Rome, 10/6/2016

were established by the Malta Report in 1968. It worked in two phases: 1970 to 1981 and 1983 to 2005. During its life span, ARCIC dealt with a number of theological issues which included, the Eucharist, Ministry and Authority, salvation, the Church as Communion, Life in Christ, Mary in the life of the Church and Grace and Hope in Christ.⁷⁶ ARCIC produced a series of agreed theological statements, which addressed issues on which agreement was required if the two communions were to live in visible unity. The first series of statements covered the Eucharist, ministry, ordination and authority and came out under the title “Final Report”. It was presented to the authorities of both churches and received official response.⁷⁷ The Anglican Church recognised the Eucharist and ministry statements as “consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans”. The initial Roman Catholic Response, however, requested further work in these two areas.⁷⁸ Further work which was done by an ARCIC Sub-committee provided clarifications which enabled the Roman Catholic Church to judge that the clarifications strengthened agreements in these two areas. Both churches, therefore, recognised the convergence in these areas although, as we shall see later, significant issues have remained to the present day.⁷⁹

As a follow up to the work done by ARCIC, in 1996 Pope John Paul II and Archbishop George Carey issued a common declaration designed to strengthen ecumenical relations between Canterbury and Rome. As a result, in May 2000 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey and the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, called a meeting for Bishops from the two communions at Mississauga in Canada. The objective was to seek a way forward in the continuing ecumenical relations between the two church traditions. It was also designed to address the imperative for Christian reconciliation and healing, assess the progress made in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations and chart a way forward for the future. The assembled bishops focused on the special relationship between the two churches, which was expressed in *Unitas Redintegratio*, the decree on ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council, which states as follows: “Among the communions separated at the time of the Reformation from the Roman see in which the Catholic concept of tradition and institutions in part continue to exist, the Anglican Communion occupies a special place.”⁸⁰

At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that a new body should be established whose task would be to promote the relationship between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. It was envisaged that the new body would be diametrically different from the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. Its mandate would be to focus on the agreements discerned

⁷⁶ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/relationships/ecumenical-dialogue/Roman-catholic/arcic.aspx>
assessed on 15/7/2018

⁷⁷ Growing together in unity and Mission (building on 40 years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue) *An Agreed Statement of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007, p.6.

⁷⁸ Growing together, *An agreed Statement...* p.6.

⁷⁹ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement...*, p.7.

⁸⁰ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement...*, p.8

by ARCIC in order to establish how the two communities would work together towards enhancing their joint witness and mission in the world.⁸¹

As a result, in 2001 the International Anglican –Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) was formed. Its mission was to offer practical suggestions on the way in which the Anglican and Roman Catholic ecumenical participation can be appropriated and carried forward. In 2007 it issued the “Agreed Statement” intended to foster and enhance discussion and reflection.⁸² It was hoped that the statement would inspire bishops to engage the clergy and laity to respond to the challenges set out in the text in the context of their local circumstances.⁸³

As a result of this arrangement, in a number of places, Anglicans and Roman Catholic Bishops began to meet regularly for consultation and prayer. Representatives of each tradition are invited to be observers at conciliar gatherings of the other. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Archbishops of Canterbury and Popes have met together on frequent occasions, praying together for the church and for the world. They have issued joint declarations which affirm the degree of communion that is already shared as well as the need to continue journeying together on the way to visible unity.⁸⁴

3. Points of theological convergence among Anglicans and Roman Catholics

It is important to note that there are a number of things that Roman Catholics and Anglicans have in common that promote and enhance their ecumenical cooperation. This section discusses some of these to show how the Anglicans and Roman Catholics have advanced ecumenism.

(a) Belief in God as a Trinity

One of the most important doctrines that connect Roman Catholics and Anglicans is their belief in a Triune God. Leonardo Boff in his book *Trinity and Society* looks at the Trinity as a mystery of inclusion. He notes that the Christian experience of God is that of unity in diversity based on the communion of the different Persons by which each is in the others, with the others, through the others and for the others. According to Boff, the Trinity is the revelation of God as God is, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in eternal correlation, interpenetration, love, and communion which make them one sole God. Boff intimates that “communion” as we find in the Trinity is an expression of love and life. Life and love, by their very nature, are dynamic and overflowing and this is what the Trinity stands for. Boff has gone further to note that the community of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, should become the prototype of the human community of those who wish to improve society and build it in such a way that it becomes the image and likeness of the Trinity.⁸⁵ It seems to me that this should be the case with the

⁸¹ Growing together, *An agreed statement*....., p.3

⁸² Growing together, *An agreed statement*.....p.3.

⁸³ Growing together, *An agreed statement*.....p.4

⁸⁴ Growing together, *An agreed statement*,.... p.8.

⁸⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, New York: Maryknoll1986, pp. 2-7.

Christian family and yet since the Reformation the different Christian denominations which profess the Trinity have failed to turn their faith into action by transforming diversity into unity.

(b) Ecclesiology as Communion in Mission

Another important element that has enhanced cooperation among Roman Catholics and Anglicans is their understanding of the nature and work of the ecclesia. Karl Rahner in *Foundations of Christian Faith* has observed that the question about the church as was really intended and founded by Christ is one of the most difficult and disputed questions in ecumenical theology.⁸⁶ Interestingly, it appears that through the work of ARCIC there is a common understanding among Anglicans and Roman Catholics that the purpose of God according to the Holy Scripture is to gather together the whole creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit into communion with God. The Church is viewed as the foretaste of this communion with God and with one another. Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that communion or *koinonia* is the term that most aptly express the image of the church and that this image requires visible expression. The church is a communion in mission. It is the sacrament of the merciful grace of God for all humankind. It exists in order to announce the fullness of the Kingdom of God. In this regard, *koinonia* with one another by Christians leads to *koinonia* with God.⁸⁷

It is also maintained that Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that the Church is the sacrament of God's saving work. It is both a sign and also an instrument of uniting all things in heaven and on earth. This mission of the church is rooted in the saving work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is generally agreed that the Church exists to announce the fullness of the Kingdom of God in the power of the Holy Spirit and that the Church is called to be a living expression of the gospel evangelized and evangelizing, reconciled and reconciling, gathered together and gathering others. It is understood that Christ's will is that his disciples should be one. In this regard, those who have been baptised in the one baptism cannot indefinitely live in a state of separation. Unity is the essence of the Church and since the Church is visible, its unity must also be visible.⁸⁸

(c) The Bible and Church Traditions

Another area of convergence between Roman Catholics and Anglicans is that they share a common Christian inheritance namely, the Bible, living traditions of liturgy, theology, spirituality, church order and mission all transmitted through the power of the Holy Spirit. This stands in sharp contrast with Reformed Theology according to which Reformers rejected church tradition as a source of divine revelation⁸⁹ and placed a great deal of emphasis on *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone) which is considered as a normative depository of divine revelation.⁹⁰ Interestingly, Anglicans and Roman Catholics consider church traditions as essential in understanding the nature of the Christian faith. They believe that the Bible is a unique

⁸⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978, p.324.

⁸⁷ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*.....pp. 14-15.

⁸⁸ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*....., pp. 14-15.

⁸⁹ R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997, p. 30,

⁹⁰ Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?*....p.13

revelation of God and uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit.⁹¹ They agree that the Church's teaching, preaching and church practice must constantly be measured against Scripture. They also agree that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Tradition of the Gospel is alive in the Church in continuity with the earliest Christians. They also agree in the first four ecumenical councils that formulated fundamental and abiding documents of the Christian faith although after that there is a divergence in terms of the councils that were held later and the doctrines that they formulated.⁹²

(d) The Sacrament of Baptism

The sacrament of baptism is another point of convergence between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. It is a visible sign or seal of an invisible grace of God's promise of salvation.⁹³ Though there are different interpretations of the sacrament of Baptism, Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that they receive one baptism administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is considered as a sacrament of initiation instituted by Jesus Christ himself by which people are incorporated into the Church –the Body of Christ. It is a sacrament of faith through which persons embrace the faith of the Church. It is believed that by baptism Christians are united with Christ in his life, death and resurrection. At baptism those who are baptised die, are buried in the waters of baptism with Christ and are raised to a new life which begins here and now in the power of Christ's resurrection. It is believed that this one baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, including original sin and that those who are baptised are pardoned, washed and cleansed by Christ who came into the world to save sinners. It is held that baptism is the unrepeatable sacrament of justification and incorporation into Christ and that those who are baptised entirely by the grace of God put on Christ, receive the Holy Spirit and are enabled to live a new life.⁹⁴

Anglicans and Roman Catholics recognise the baptism each offers. They believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit, baptism initiates a renewal of life and growth in holiness which God will bring to completion in eternal life. Those who are baptised enter into a lifelong process of sanctification. They grow into conformity with Christ. The process continues until Christ comes again when those who are baptised will be like Christ. It is taught that through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the church every time and place. Both Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches believe that baptism leads to confirmation. This is an empowerment by the Holy Spirit for witness, mission and public manifestation of membership in the body of Christ.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*..... p21.

⁹² Growing together, *An Agreed Statement* p. 22.

⁹³ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, p.423.

⁹⁴ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*, p23.

⁹⁵ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*...p23.

e. The Eucharist

The Eucharist occupies a central position in the life of both the Roman Catholics and Anglicans. John Macquarrie has pointed out that the Eucharist is the sacrament which provides the structure and support for the growth of the Christian life in the process of sanctification. It is the sacrament of corpus Christi, the body of Christ per excellence. When Christians receive the same bread and drink they realize in a very impressive way the oneness of the members of the community with each other as well as their communion with God.⁹⁶

Interestingly, both Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that full participation in the Eucharist together with baptism and confirmation completes the sacramental process of Christian initiation. The Eucharist is conceived as a gift received from the Lord himself and celebrated in obedience to his command until he comes again. At the Eucharist Christians receive the body and blood of Christ. It is believed that at the Eucharist Christ is present and the visible unity of Christians is nourished, deepened and expressed in action when believers eat and drink the body and blood of Christ. Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that the Eucharist is the memorial of the crucified and risen Christ and that the entire work of reconciliation between God and human beings has been accomplished in him. By memorial, both Roman Catholics and Anglicans intend to mean not merely calling to mind or remembering what God has done in the past but an effectual sacramental proclamation which through the action of the Holy Spirit makes present what was accomplished in the past. The Eucharist is considered as a sacrifice offered once for all by the Father which cannot be repeated or added to. It is not a repetition of the historical sacrifice. The Eucharistic celebration makes the sacrifice of Christ present for Christians today.⁹⁷

Roman Catholics and Anglicans believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It is signified effectively by the bread and wine which become his body and blood. Bread and wine for this life becomes bread and wine for eternal life. During the Eucharist the presence of Christ is not confined to the consecrated elements. He is present and active in a variety of ways in the entire Eucharistic celebration. However, in the bread and wine which become the body and blood of Christ, Christ is really present and is really given to people in these elements. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist does not depend on an individual believer's faith. He is present in the power of the Holy Spirit. Anglicans and Roman Catholics, however, believe that faith is required in order for the believer to have a life-giving encounter with Christ.⁹⁸

The Eucharist is conceived as the "meal of the Kingdom" in which the Church gives thanks for all the signs of the coming Kingdom and that the celebration of the Eucharist involves the whole church and that the whole church is involved in the celebration of the Eucharist. The communion established in the body of Christ is a communion with all Christians of all times

⁹⁶ John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977, pp.471-3.

⁹⁷ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement....*, p26.

⁹⁸ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement....* p27.

and all places. Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that only bishops and episcopally ordained and authorised priests are allowed to preside at the Eucharist.⁹⁹

f. Church ministry

Another area of agreement though with some challenges between Roman Catholics and Anglicans is the area of Church ministry. According to Wayne Grudem, church ministry is one of the specific means that the Holy Spirit very frequently uses to bring blessings to individual Christians. This means of grace works when one or more Christians within the church take time to minister in various ways to specific needs of others in the church and the community such as offering a word of encouragement, exhortation, wise counsel, anointing with oil, laying on of hands, assisting with material needs to name a few.¹⁰⁰ As far as church ministry is concerned, Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that Christ entrusted his own ministry to the whole church as his body. His ministry is the source and model from which all ministries flow and take their shape. In other words, the ministry of the Church is the ministry of Christ himself. Particular attention is paid to the ordained ministry but it is understood that the Holy Spirit gives to every baptised person gifts to be used in the service of the Christian community and in the service of the world and its needs. All are called to offer their lives as a living sacrifice and to pray for the church and the world. The ordained ministry is the ministry of Christ himself with the responsibility of continuing the teaching and mission of the Apostles which was began in the life, work, death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁰¹

It should be noted that both Roman Catholics and Anglicans agree to the threefold ordering of the ministry, that is, bishops, priests and deacons as having emerged from the pattern of the ministry of the early Church in the New Testament under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in every era of the history of the Church. Ordination is acceptable within both communions. Ordination of clergy is considered and understood by both Anglicans and Roman Catholics as being in succession of the Apostles within the apostolicity of the whole church. Those who are ordained have the responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament.¹⁰²

4. Obstacles to full visible unity between Anglicans and Roman Catholics

Having discussed the above areas in which both Roman Catholics and Anglicans agree, it is important to note that there are a number of obstacles on the way to visible church unity between the two church traditions.

a. Ecclesiology

Though we noted above that Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree on a number of issues regarding the ecclesia, it should be noted that there are a number of subtle differences that keep

⁹⁹ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*...., p27-28.

¹⁰⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994, p.959.

¹⁰¹ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*...., p29.

¹⁰² Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*, pp31-32.

the two churches apart from each other. One of these is the divergent answers given to the question “where is the church to be found”? For the Anglicans an authentic church exists where one finds the following four authentic signs (1) Scripture, Old and New Testaments, (2) the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, (3) Sacrament of Baptism and Eucharist and (4) the historic episcopacy. In the Anglican Communion there are four instruments of unity namely the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference of Bishops, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting. Generally speaking, meetings of bishops with a presiding bishop and councils or synods which bring together bishops, clergy and laity at the diocesan or provincial levels provide a mechanism for unity for the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this structure, there is no room for the Pope.¹⁰³

On the other hand, for the Roman Catholics, the church exists where people possess the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the church with her entire organisation joined together by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, ecclesiastical government and communion and joined in the visible structure of the church of Christ through the Pope.¹⁰⁴ It is taught that the Church of Christ that we confess in the creed to be One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic-subsists in the Roman Catholic Church which is governed by the Successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. It is held that the fullness of grace and truths and fullness of the means of salvation have been entrusted to the Roman Catholic Church only.¹⁰⁵

This view is held despite the fact that the Roman Catholic Church recognises that some of the significant elements such as Scripture, sincere religious zeal, baptism and other sacraments are found in other Christian communities which means that the one church of Christ is effectively found present in them. The Roman Catholic Church emphasises the supremacy of the Petrine Office. One of the landmarks of the teaching of Vatican II is that bishops form a college in succession to the college of the apostles and that together with the Pope, and never apart from him, have supremacy and full authority over the universal church. In as far as the Anglican Church is concerned, this remains a contested area though it is acknowledged that if visible church unity is to be realised this can only be achieved with a common ministry of oversight.¹⁰⁶

b. Church ministry

One of the issues that has been a bone of contention between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church has been the ordained ministry of the church which is traced back to the time of the Reformation in the 16th Century. This culminated in 1896 when in his Apostolic Letter on Anglican Orders titled *Apostolicae Curae* Pope Leo XIII ruled against the validity of Anglican Orders. The question of validity remains a fundamental obstacle to the recognition of Anglican ministry by the Roman Catholic Church. So far it appears that in the light of the agreements on the Eucharist and ministry noted in the ARCIC Statements and in the official responses of both communions, there is evidence that both church traditions have a lot in

¹⁰³Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*...., p18.

¹⁰⁴Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*....p.18

¹⁰⁵Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*...., p18.

¹⁰⁶ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*....., pp 18-19.

common regarding their understanding of the intention and ordination of the clergy and the celebration of the Eucharist. It is noted by ecumenicists that this awareness should be part of any fresh evaluation of the Anglican Orders.¹⁰⁷

c. Ordination of women to priesthood

The ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopacy has made matters very difficult between Anglicans and Roman Catholics when it comes to matters of bilateral ecumenical relations. The position and practice of the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries is that women should not be ordained to priesthood. Patricia Daniel has postulated that this position is based on the theology of St. Paul as stipulated in his letters particularly those to Timothy and Titus. The Pauline corpus relegates women to the position of inferiority in the structures of the Church by allowing them to teach other women and children and to remain silent in the Church. The Roman Catholic Church has used Pauline theology to forbid the ordination of women in the church.¹⁰⁸

Roman Catholics argue that the unbroken tradition of the church does not allow the ordination of women to priesthood. This view was reinforced by Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter "Ordinatio Sacerdotalis 1994" in which he discussed the Catholic Church's position requiring "the reservation of priestly ordination to men alone" and wrote that "the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination to women". This stands in sharp contrast to the Anglican view that there are no theological objections to such a development and that by ordaining women to priesthood, Anglicans are not departing neither from the traditional understanding of apostolic ministry nor the nature of ministry set forth in the ARCIC Statements.¹⁰⁹

d. Authority in the Church

Another hurdle on the march to visible unity is authority in the church. Edward J. Yarnold has indicated that the term authority is complex and that it carries with it a number of associations including that of power.¹¹⁰ According to Yarnold, in the Roman Catholic Church authority is attributed to the Pope as bishop of Rome, which was formerly defined at the First Vatican Council in 1870. The Council attributed to the Pope within the whole church a primacy held in succession to the primacy which Jesus Christ conferred to Peter (Mt. 16: 18).¹¹¹ In this regard, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that the ministry of the Bishop of Rome has universal

¹⁰⁷ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement of ...*, p33.

¹⁰⁸ Patricia Daniel, "Feminism" in Gareth Jones (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 436.

¹⁰⁹ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement ...* p33.

¹¹⁰ Edward J. Yarnold, "Authority" in Alister E. McGrath, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993, p. 21.

¹¹¹ Yarnold, "Authority"p.23.

primacy in accordance with Christ's will for the church and an essential element for maintaining it in unity and truths. This is the only see which makes any claim of universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such episcopate in Rome the city where Peter died.¹¹²

Anglicans rejected the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome as a universal primate in the 16th century. Today, however, some Anglicans are beginning to see the particular value of a ministry of universal episcopacy which can be exercised by the Bishop of Rome as a sign and a focus of unity within a re-united church.¹¹³ Despite this development, questions still exist regarding the jurisdiction ascribed to the Bishop of Rome as existing in the church by divine right. Anglicans also question the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope according to which the Pope can make judgments on matters of faith and morals which are preserved from error because his oversight is assisted by the power of the Holy Spirit. Anglicans are of the view that the infallibility of the church is preserved by fidelity to scriptures, the catholic creeds, the sacraments and ministry of bishops. They do not assign an infallible ministry to any group or individual within the life of the church. They hold that such a doctrine, however defined, must be received by the body of believers to whom it is addressed and must be consonant with scripture and church tradition.¹¹⁴

e. Private confession

Another area where Anglicans and Roman Catholics lack unanimity is in the area of private confession. John Macquarrie has defined confession as "the knowledge of one's guilt to other persons or to God".¹¹⁵ According to Macquarrie, the church provides for confession of sins in various ways one of which is private confession to a priest who is authorised to give to the penitent absolution, counsel and penance.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, on this matter the Roman Catholic's position is that the Sacrament of Confession is an obligation for those conscious of serious sins and that they should confess their sins privately before a priest. This view differs somewhat from the Anglican understanding of private confession. As a result of the Reformation, which emphasises on the direct access of the sinner to the forgiving and sustaining Word of God, Anglicans reject the view that private confession is obligatory. They hold that private confession is a wholesome means of grace and the formula used is that all may, none must, some should.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Growing together, *An Agreed Statement* pp34-35).

¹¹³ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement* ..., p37.

¹¹⁴ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement* ..., p39.

¹¹⁵ John Macquarrie, "Confession" in Macquarrie, J. & James Childress (eds.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, London: The Westminster Press, 1986, p. 111.

¹¹⁶ Macquarrie, "Confession" ...p.111.

¹¹⁷ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement*p46-47.

f. Marriage, contraceptives and homosexuality

Other areas of divergence have been noted in the sacrament of marriage, the use of contraceptives and homosexuality. As regards marriage, the Roman Catholic view is that marriage is a union for life and that it is not possible to dissolve the marriage bond sacramentally constituted because of its indissolubility. This is because it signifies the covenant relationship of Christ within the church. However, the Roman Catholic Church recognizes that a true marriage was never contracted if certain conditions were never met. In such cases a declaration of nullity may be granted by the proper authorities. This position is somewhat different from the Anglican Church in that it is willing to recognise divorce following the breakdown of a marriage sacramentally constituted. In this regard, in recent years there have been circumstances in which the church is prepared to allow partners from an earlier marriage to enter into another marriage.¹¹⁸

Another area of contention is the use of contraceptives. John T. Noonan has noted that by contraception is commonly understood as the use of physical or chemical means to prevent sexual intercourse from resulting in the conception of a child.¹¹⁹ The Roman Catholic Church teaches that when a couple is married every act of intercourse should be open to procreation. The use of contraceptives therefore is not allowed. The Anglican position follows the recommendation made at the 1930 Lambeth Conference according to which contraceptives can be used where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding parenthood and a sound reason for avoiding abstinence or any other method to do so.¹²⁰

Finally in recent years disagreement between Roman Catholics and Anglicans has been based on the issue of homosexuality. James B. Nelson has defined homosexuality as “the presence of a predominant and persistent psychosexual attraction towards members of the same sex”.¹²¹ Roman Catholics teach that homosexual activity is always intrinsically and objectively wrong because it is contrary to the laws of nature. Some Anglicans share this view but others do not. As a result, there are some Anglican dioceses and provincial synods which have recently advocated the recognition and blessings of same sex relationships within the life of the church and civil society. To make matters worse, the consecration of Bishop **Vicky Gene Robinson** of the Diocese of New Hampshire in USA, a person living in an openly acknowledged committed same-sex relationship, and the authorization of public Rites of Blessing for the same sex unions created a dispute within the Anglican Communion. As a consequence of the ordination of a homosexual and women to the episcopate it has now been concluded that it is not the right time to embark on a new stage of visible church unity as envisaged at Mississauga.¹²² In this regard, the consecration of a homosexual to the episcopacy in the

¹¹⁸ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement...* p47.

¹¹⁹ John T. Noonan, “Contraception” in Macquarrie, J. & James Childress (eds.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, London: The Westminster Press, 1986, p.124.

¹²⁰ Growing together, *An Agreed Statement...*, p44).

¹²¹ James B. Nelson, “Homosexuality” in Macquarrie, J. & James Childress (eds.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, London: The Westminster Press, 1986, p.271.

¹²² Growing together, *An Agreed Statement...*, p10).

Anglican Communion became the straw that broke the empire's back. This essentially affirms the argument of this paper according to which the bilateral relations between the Anglicans and Roman Catholics is a "back and forth process" a kind of "one step forward and two steps back" movement, thus making the final goal almost unachievable.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has discussed Anglican-Roman Catholic bilateral ecumenical relations. It has focused on the agreed theological texts towards church unity that have been worked out by ARCIC and IARCCUM for over a period of forty years and yet they have not succeeded. While the agreed statements deal with a wide range of theological issues that can ultimately bring the two churches into an organic church unity, there are a number of subtle differences which outweigh the agreed theological statements on baptism, Eucharist, authority, ecclesiology, ordination of women, use of contraceptives, ordination of homosexuals and a host of other issues. This makes efforts to achieve visible church unity look like a "wishful thinking" never to be materialized in real ecclesiastical life here on earth.

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