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**Commentary and Study Guide
on the Seattle Statement**

Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ

of the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission

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INTRODUCTION

The background to the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), and all its agreed statements including this latest one concerning Mary, lies in the era of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and the Roman Catholic Church's attempt to examine its relationship to the modern cultural context, including other Christian denominations. In 1966 Archbishop Michael Ramsey met Pope Paul VI in Rome and with a view to finding ways of overcoming historic differences they issued a Common Declaration, setting up a dialogue with the aim of producing a unity in truth and faith, the unity for which Jesus prayed. This unity was envisaged to be 'a complete communion of faith and sacramental life'. From 1970 the Commission, with nine members on each side and representing the two Churches' international spread across the world, met and produced a series of agreed statements. 1971 saw the statement on Eucharistic Doctrine; 1973 that on Ministry and Ordination; 1976 and 1981 on Authority in the Church. The 1988 Lambeth Conference, the international Anglican gathering convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury, resolved that the statements on Eucharist and Ministry were 'consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans', but called for more study on the Authority statement. The Roman Catholic Church responded through its Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1991, acknowledging some agreement and some remaining differences.

A newly staffed second Commission, ARCIC II, was set up by Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie in 1982. Agreed statements followed entitled *Salvation and the Church* 1986, *The Church as Communion* 1990, on the nature of the Church. 1993 saw an agreed statement on morals entitled *Life in Christ*. The ongoing question about the authority of the Pope in the Church was taken up again in *The Gift of Authority* 1998. ARCIC had been working primarily on the nature of the Church, its sacraments and ministry, and how authority worked within the Church for its well being and faithfulness to the message of Jesus. The Church of England's General Synod recently gave some qualified approval to *The Gift of Authority* which argued for accepting the Papacy as an agency for articulating divine will in conjunction with fellow bishops and the whole people of God. There is no doubt that both communions, Roman and Anglican, are serious about restoring unity broken at the time of the Reformation, by a process of self-examination and avoidance of traditional, divisive, ways of stating doctrine.

Ironically the figure of Mary, mother of Jesus and a gentle person in the pages of the New Testament, is another major area of division between the Churches, although Anglicans themselves are used to Anglo-Catholics practising devotions to Mary in churches and by

pilgrimages to shrines at places such as Walsingham in the UK. ARCIC II has now issued its agreed statement on this question, as was requested of them in the original Malta Statement in 1968, and again as a result of the meeting of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops in Mississauga in 2000.

In the earlier ARCIC agreed statement, *Authority in the Church II* (1981), agreement was recorded over Mary as *Theotókos*, God-bearer, and as a model of holiness, a prophetic figure of the Church before and after the incarnation. But major disagreement was registered over the dogmas of the immaculate conception of Mary and her assumption, the teachings that she was conceived in a special way without sin, and that she was taken directly into heaven at the end of her life. Neither of these teachings can be found in the New Testament, and moreover both teachings were made binding on the faithful by decree of the Pope, independently of any church council. These are the key problems to be overcome in this new agreed statement, along with the questions linked to the acceptability of addressing Mary in prayer. ARCIC seeks to remain faithful to the New Testament pattern of faith and worship, using a theology of grace and hope, one rooted also in the experience of Christian worship and devotion. ARCIC invokes the 'Yes and Amen' structure found in the agreed statement *The Gift of Authority* as a means of interpreting Mary's Amen, let it be done to me, in response to the address of the angel. She represents Christian discipleship and obedience.

We will now go through the agreed statement section by section, trying to summarise its teachings, making some comments from particularly an Anglican perspective, and raising some questions.

A MARY ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

The first section of the statement considers Mary as she appears in the New Testament. This raises the issue of interpreting the texts, and ARCIC is aware that overly 'typological' interpretation can become extravagant, while historical-critical approaches focused on an original meaning can prove 'reductionist'. Typological interpretation gives the Mary found in the biblical narratives the role of an ideal 'type', or perhaps 'icon' in modern secular parlance: she stands for certain truths which can be developed at some length. This way of interpreting the text makes much of the aspect of the meaning of Mary, and this meaning can add further levels of meaning and so become exaggerated. On the other hand, interpreters who focus on the historical side of the narrated Mary, the events that actually happened, may fail to consider her meaning enough, and 'reduce' that meaning to simply what happened. In other words, much depends on how the symbolic meanings attached to the Mary of the New Testament can be taken to extend her historical role into a more transcendent one, and how she could be regarded as having a role in the history of salvation but nothing more. In a sense this, in a nutshell, could be said to be the root of the disagreement between the two Churches.

ARCIC says that it wishes to benefit from the range of modern approaches of interpretation. It begins in the Old Testament, arguing that the witness of Scripture offers

a ‘trajectory’, or perhaps pathway, of grace and hope, of forgiveness and new beginnings. Israel is the covenant partner of God, symbolically his bride and handmaiden. Scripture speaks of a calling of individuals from their first beginnings, for example, Jeremiah, and the ‘prevenient’, or ‘given in advance’, grace of God will be a permeating theme of the agreement. Rather like the well known story of the ‘footsteps in the sand’, God has been ahead of us to prepare our path. Romans 8.28 – 30 is cited here as a key text: ‘those whom God foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...And those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified’. This trajectory of grace and hope leads to Christ to fulfil the divine purposes. The role of Israel as the covenant partner of God leads finally to Jesus, by the divine plan of God. As a vital part of this plan, God needs to work through human freedom and consent, and the young Jewish teenage girl Mary gives her full and faithful consent to the divine call to be mother of the Messiah, declaring through her very natural and human puzzlement, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word’ (Luke 1.38). Matthew and Luke refer to Mary specifically in telling the story of Jesus’ conception and birth; Mark and John do not, nor does Paul speak of a special mode of Jesus’ birth in any way. For Matthew and Luke, descent in the royal line of David emphasises the Messianic expectation, and the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary discloses the radical newness coming with his birth: God is bringing about a completely new phase in his saving activity in human history. In this, ARCIC is in line with the orientation of biblical tradition, so for example we read that Jesus, later in his ministry, as he enters Jerusalem for the last time, rides on a colt ‘on which no one has ever sat’, again symbolising the note of radical newness introduced by Jesus’ reign in history. The God of the Bible brings about new and wonderful things in mysterious and surprising ways.

Luke’s narrative of the annunciation, when the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and announces her calling (Luke 1.26ff), portrays her, ARCIC says, as uniquely the recipient of election and grace, in line with a series of special births narrated in the Old Testament such as those of Isaac, Samson and Samuel, all children born in the divine plan and by particular divine intervention. Mary’s psalm of praise, the *Magnificat* (Luke 1.46ff), stands in this biblical tradition, and ARCIC argues that the *Magnificat* provides the scriptural basis for an appropriate devotion to Mary, since in that psalm she says that all generations will call her ‘blessed’. Mary’s agreement to the angel’s declaration of her destiny, ‘let it be to me according to your word’, in Latin *fiat*, her Amen to God’s will, is given in faith and freedom. Luke also has the premonition of pain for Mary later, (Luke 2.34) ‘a sword will pierce your soul’, pointing ahead to suffering involved in her vocation and ministry as the mother of Jesus.

In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit, miraculously, without the biological fatherhood of Joseph, Mary’s betrothed, who nevertheless sticks by Mary, taking her at her word. Mary thus conceives the baby without losing her virginity. Matthew narrates this by saying, ‘before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 1.18). ARCIC teaches that this ‘virginal conception’ [18] is primarily a sign of divine presence, the work of the Spirit, rather perhaps than a description as might be given in a biological textbook. Footnote 2 rejects any notion that the virgin conception is analogous to a magical coming together of

supernature and nature, as if some pagan mythical story. ARCIC wishes to stress the meaning of the story, and indeed sets it together with the ‘new birth of every Christian’ by water and the Spirit (John 3.3-5), avoiding the sense of Jesus’ conception and birth as ‘an isolated miracle’ [18]. ARCIC in footnote 3 of their statement notes that the New Testament speaks of Jesus’ brothers, with the implication that Mary had other children following Jesus’ birth. But ARCIC suggests that they may refer to kinsmen or relatives rather than literal brothers.

Having discussed the conception and birth of Jesus, ARCIC [19] moves on to ‘Mary and the true family of Jesus’, taking its cue from the incident in Mark’s Gospel where Jesus’ mother and brothers come and wait for Jesus, wanting to speak to him (Mark 3.31). There Jesus distances himself from his ‘natural’ family, stressing instead those who do the will of God, the family of faith or his ‘eschatological family’, his new family rooted in the Kingdom of God rather than blood relationships. His natural mother Mary seems at first to lack deep understanding of his mission, but this is said to develop as for other disciples. In Acts 1.14 Mary and Jesus’ brothers are depicted as waiting with the apostles for the coming of the Pentecostal Spirit, the birth of the Church.

Mary in John’s Gospel [23] is interpreted as herself entering into discipleship and faith, as compared with only a blood relationship, at the feast at Cana (John 2.8). There Jesus asks Mary ‘O woman, what have you to do with me?’, when Mary tells him that there is no wine. ARCIC suggests that the natural bonds between mother and son give way to the new relationship rooted in faith in God and his kingdom coming in Jesus. Mary becomes a disciple with a role of helping others come to Jesus [25]. John’s Gospel notes Jesus’ words from the cross to his disciples, ‘behold your mother’, indicating not only a real care for her but also a wider motherly role for Mary in the Church, according to ARCIC [26]. Jesus addresses Mary directly from the cross as ‘woman’, and ARCIC expands this with a Mary-Eve typology [27], affirming that Mary is on a spiritual level ‘mother of all who gain true life from the water and blood that flow from the side of Christ’. This is a ‘symbolic and corporate reading’ [27]. In this light, says ARCIC, it is difficult to speak of the Church without thinking of Mary as its first realisation.

The book of Revelation and its reference to the ‘woman’ is taken as meaning the people of God, the Church, oppressed by Satan. But some patristic writers came to think of Mary when reading this narrative.

Overall, the scriptural witness summons all believers to call Mary blessed as the handmaid of the Lord, who suffered for her faithfulness. ARCIC wishes to weave us, the present readers of Scripture, into the narratives about Mary and the apostles, for example, that we are at one with them as they pray for the outpouring of the Spirit on the Church. We may even glimpse in her the final destiny of God’s people to conquer sin and death [30].

Questions many Anglicans will be asking of ARCIC’s treatment of the Scripture passages on Mary will include that of the brothers of Jesus, and why the plain meaning of these references should be altered, indeed whether such alteration is justified as fair interpretation and whether Jesus having brothers should be problematic. The style of

ARCIC's interpretation is often to take up symbolic meanings of a narrative and develop these, for example the movement from Mary as 'woman' to her as a second Eve. The suggestion that Mary moves from the role of natural mother to that of disciple in the new family, or perhaps kingdom, of Jesus, is an interesting one. Mary is described by ARCIC so far as the humble young Jewish woman who freely agrees to take up the vocation given her, and whose relationship to her son develops into that of disciple. There is no doubt that this section on Scripture will provide much common ground.

Possible questions to consider

Have Anglicans generally failed to give proper attention to Mary in Scripture, and if so why?

Why is the possibility of Jesus having brothers a sensitive one for ARCIC, and is it faced honestly?

How might it be helpful to think of Mary as a member of Jesus' natural family and also, later, as a disciple in his eschatological family of faith?

What do you think of the way ARCIC interprets the relevant texts historically and symbolically?

Do you agree that Mary should be regarded as the New Eve, paralleling Jesus as the New Adam?

Does the role of the Holy Spirit in the narratives of Mary and Jesus receive sufficient attention?

B MARY IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The statement moves on to discuss the history of discussion of Mary in the Church. The early paragraphs in this section, [31] ff, deal with the Christological controversies, the debates attempting best to shape a Christian definition of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. Part of these debates was the Greek word *Theotókos*, 'God-bearer' or 'Mother of God', as a proper title for Mary. This word became part of the historic Chalcedonian Definition agreed in 451 at Chalcedon, a city near the Black Sea. Why was this word so important? It was regarded as confirming a crystal clear statement about the very identity of Jesus, who he actually was and is, his very self or 'person'. The theologians and bishops came to the conclusion that they could not do justice to this question by describing Jesus only as an inspired man, indwelt by the Spirit or the Word, as found for example in the case of Jeremiah, to whom the word of the Lord said 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations' (Jeremiah 1.4). At Chalcedon it was decided to recognise that Jesus *was* the Word or Son of God, of the same being as God the Father. That is his identity, and this Trinitarian Son has assumed a full human nature. Mary

therefore gave birth to none other than this divine Son of God, he was the baby born to her, humanly. The title *Theotókos* for Mary safeguards the humanity of Jesus and his identity as the divine Word. Mary gave birth to her son of her own substance, ‘he did not just appear to be human; he did not descend from heaven in a heavenly body, nor when he was born did he simply pass through his mother. The Chalcedonian Definition specifically enshrined the term *Theotókos* of Mary [34]. The councils of Nicea and Chalcedon have always been authoritative for Anglicans in upholding the divine person of Christ with his full human nature, and the title of *Theotókos* accordingly as fitting for Mary. So far therefore there is full accord between the Roman Catholic and Anglican doctrines of Mary and Jesus, both stand in the ‘ancient common tradition’.

ARCIC now takes us on to the issue of ‘the celebration of Mary in the ancient common tradition’ [35], charting the growth of piety in relation to Mary in heaven. This begins with the theological significance of the ‘cloud of witnesses’ (Hebrews 12.1) and the communion of saints gone before. Mary came to have a special place in this heavenly communion and scriptural themes were adapted accordingly, notably those of Mary as the New Eve and as the quintessential figure representing the ideal Church as obedient and faithful. Reflection on the place of Mary in the communion of saints and her motherly care prompted devotion as a deeply sympathetic figure and prayer both private and public. Some early Christian theologians linked the theme of Jesus as second Adam reversing the disobedience of the first Adam to that of Mary as the second Eve overcoming sin and providing a new Eve for the human race, linked to Jesus. Her historical role as his mother has developed, through a consideration of the communion of saints in heaven, into a role as second Eve in solidarity with the human race, as is the second Adam. Some early Christian theologians link the theme of Jesus as the second Adam, reversing the disobedience of the first Adam, with that of Mary as the second Eve, since she was obedient to God in contrast to the first Eve on behalf of the human race, in a way parallel to her Son’s obedience.

ARCIC points out that in Christian history Mary’s obedience shown in history is translated to a heavenly role, and she becomes a model of holiness. This is associated with her virginal conception of Jesus, and she gradually gained the title ‘Ever Virgin’. In a long footnote ARCIC explains that this title involves Mary not only being a virgin at the conception of Jesus, but that ‘She conceived him as a virgin, she gave birth as a virgin, she remained a virgin’. Clearly this claim stretches the New Testament evidence, and is linked to the references to the brothers of Jesus and the argument that these were not in fact brothers but other kinsmen. The idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary was at the same time taken to symbolise her inner attitudes of openness to God, obedience and faith, the model of Christian discipleship. This then extended to the idea that Mary was sinless, as Augustine is quoted as teaching. The title ‘all-holy’ can be found in church life by the sixth century.

Devotion to her flourished following the Chalcedonian title *Theotókos*, with texts and images celebrating her holiness, praying with her, praising her and asking her protection [39]. Celebration of Mary was written into liturgies. Feasts developed concerning the end and beginning of her life, her conception being celebrated in England in the early

eleventh century [40]. Legendary stories influenced the growth of the idea that she was taken into heaven, or 'assumed', in a special way at the end of her life, without suffering death. She became part of the victorious Church triumphant in heaven, the glorified body of Jesus, the Church.

ARCIC goes on to consider 'The growth of Marian doctrine and devotion in the Middle Ages', including some criticism of some of these developments [41]. During this era the humanity of Jesus was dwelt upon by theologians and, in parallel, so were the virtues and merits of Mary. Christ and Mary became linked in devotional life, and practices such as the rosary developed. Christian art reflected this rich mixture of spirituality. Mary's role as an ideal type of the Church grew. But ARCIC tells us that she gradually was placed in a mediatorial position, dispensing the graces of Christ *to* the Church. Mary's sinlessness was affirmed, to the point where she was considered possibly to have been 'immaculate' from the day of her conception. She came to occupy a role as worker of miracles and intermediary between God and humanity, in what ARCIC calls 'the florid Marian devotion of the Late Middle Ages' [43].

The Reformation is then described in relation to this spirituality. It pruned back the florid growth and abuses, attempting to regain the central focus on Christ's salvation but, according to ARCIC, may have overdone the pruning in their desire to ensure the centrality of Christ as sole mediator. ARCIC speaks of the Reformation as a radical 're-reception' of Scripture and the doctrine of Jesus as the sole mediator. The Reformers continued to honour Mary, but in her role as historical partner in the saving story of Jesus. Latimer and Cranmer followed the tradition they had inherited by accepting Mary as 'ever virgin' [45]. The Reformers did not affirm or deny Mary's sinlessness, but they strongly stress the universality of sin and the need for Christ's redemption. The Book of Common Prayer omitted the feast of Mary's Assumption, as lacking scriptural warrant. Nevertheless Mary's great psalm of praise, the Magnificat, is part and parcel of the Anglican service of Evening Prayer.

The Counter Reformation ensured that Mary was a distinguishing marker against Protestantism. Her devotion flourished in the 19th Century, so that popular devotional pressure built up leading to the Pope defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854, a dogma necessary for all Roman Catholic faithful to accept as infallibly true. 1950 similarly saw the declaration of the dogma of Mary's Assumption into heaven. In the twentieth century, in 1964, Vatican II is thought to have under-emphasised devotions to Mary, and Pope Paul VI had to foster such devotions again, but within the doctrines of Christ and the Church. He commended the saying of the Angelus and the Rosary as within these criteria, as did Pope John Paul II. It has to be noted here that ARCIC does not discuss the very great stress placed on Mary by Pope John Paul II as the guide through his life, the excommunication of Fr Tissa Balasuriya for his book on Mary, *Mary and Human Liberation* 1997, on the grounds that it played down her freedom from the taint of original sin.

Anglicans [49] are said to have given Mary a new prominence in worship through liturgies, and a 're-reception' of the place of Mary is claimed to have taken place by both

Churches. She is seen by both communions as the New Eve and a type of the Church [51]. ARCIC stresses the place of Mary with the saints in their ongoing prayer for the Church in history. Mary is inseparably linked to Christ and the Church.

Possible questions to consider

Does the title ‘God-bearer’ or *Theotókos*, agreed by all Churches as appropriate, help you understand who Jesus is?

What do you make of the idea that Mary was and is ‘Ever Virgin’, even after the birth of Jesus? Does this help or hinder our understanding of the incarnation?

Have we appreciated fully the fact that the humanity of Jesus is of Mary?

Assess ARCIC’s presentation of the claim that Mary was wholly sinless.

From the praiseworthy motive of paying due honour to Mary in wholeheartedly obeying the divine calling, how and why did the cult of Mary get out of control in the High Middle Ages? How should the Church prevent Mary obscuring Christ as sympathetic mediator with us?

Do you agree with ARCIC that the correct attitude to Mary is a reformed Roman Catholic one, guarded with a strong doctrine of Christ?

Is the idea of being part of the communion of saints, earthly and heavenly, a new one for you, and is there warrant for being in conscious communion with individual saints in glory?

C MARY WITHIN THE PATTERN OF GRACE AND HOPE

This section, [52]-[63], seeks to provide the theological rationale for overcoming the major disagreements set out by ARCIC I, stated above. The method is that of reading back from fulfilment to inception, a kind of retroactive principle. We are bidden to view the economy of grace from its fulfilment in Christ back into history [52]. Romans 8.30 is cited here, appealing to divine predestinating action, working out in historical life. Mary is to be called blessed in the future at her calling by Gabriel; she embodies the elect Israel of whom Paul speaks in Romans 8.30. God was at work in Mary from the start of her life. We have no history of the end of her life, but some analogies from Scripture indicate that she might have entered glory without tasting death [56]; this is part of the pattern of anticipated eschatology. She is a sign of hope for all humanity. She is a new creation, the type of the Church, and a disciple.

The papal definitions can now be explained in terms of divine purpose [58]. The dogma of the Assumption is rendered plausible by way of stretching the logic of hope and glory,

indeed as a dogma it defines a fact of history, otherwise unknowable. The issue of Mary's Immaculate Conception, defined in 1854, is considered by way of her Son's redeeming work being retrospectively implied to her from the conception of her life, so avoiding the problem of her not needing his redemption because of an inherent sinlessness [59]. She is preserved from the stain of original sin by God's constant mercy in the economy of grace by divine predestination.

ARCIC's presentation of Mary full of grace, predestined for her role in the divine plan of salvation, is strikingly reminiscent of a very similar treatment of Christ proposed by the Scottish theologian Donald Baillie, albeit a Christology which has been found by critics to offer a picture of inspiration rather than of full incarnation. Baillie suggested the best way of understanding Christ was by way of the analogy of grace and its paradoxical nature as we experience it. We are free and yet as disciples can look back and see divine grace has in fact been sustaining us despite our feelings of desperation and weakness. The paradox is that we act freely, and yet God's grace is at work in and through our free choices. Likewise the paradox of sin and grace is that when we sin we blame ourselves, but when we do what is right the Christian disciple gives the glory to God. Jesus lived out this paradox of grace to the fullest extent, being wholly open to divine grace and wholly human. Baillie says that we can trace this prevenient grace back to the intention of God. God was in Christ by the grace of God. His battle with sin was won in this way, through full human freedom constantly exercised according to God's will.

ARCIC similarly argues of Mary that God was at work in her by grace from her earliest beginnings, and the paradox is that she was fully and freely obedient to the divine will. In that way she can be said to be sinless, rather than by way of special and different sort of conception or inherent sinlessness by nature. The end of Mary's life on earth, ARCIC says, is not directly revealed in Scripture or historical evidence. However, by analogy with figures such as Elijah who was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind, and the penitent thief on the cross with Jesus who is promised an immediate place with Jesus in paradise, ARCIC reflects that the idea of Mary being assumed into heaven by God gains some plausibility. ARCIC argues that the spiritual merit and destiny of Mary could appropriately be consummated by such an assumption into heaven. This Old Testament analogy is taken to be an anticipation of the destiny of all disciples, the Church, and also a sign of hope for all humanity. If we asked ARCIC whether Mary's assumption into heaven as a sign of hope to humanity might be in danger of displacing, or obscuring the place of Christ's resurrection as the truest sign of that hope, ARCIC might respond that Mary's assumption shares in the messianic destiny of Jesus, or that she follows in his pathway which he has pioneered. This kind of argumentation will inevitably provide much food for thought particularly on the part of Anglicans who are being invited to accept this logic of deriving historical events from spiritual symbolism about Mary in the economy of grace.

The Anglican problem that the papal dogmatic definitions, for Roman Catholics, are in effect revealed by God [60] by virtue of their status, is discussed in the light of changing contexts and understandings of revelation. The dogmas are presented by ARCIC as a kind of witness to revelation, perhaps akin to the Rabbinical 'fence around the law'. When

such truths expressed in the papal dogmas are affirmed as revealed by God, ‘there is no suggestion of new revelation’, and ARCIC’s earlier *Gift of Authority* developed a method of showing such claims to be in conformity with Scripture by not conflicting with it [61]. The papal dogmas gave voice to the consensus of faith among believers in communion with the Bishop of Rome, and were reaffirmed by Vatican II. Anglicans are said to need, at the very least, the consent of an ecumenical council for such teaching to become *de fide*, a concept itself raising some major questions for Anglicans, lay and ordained [62]. Most Anglicans would need strong scriptural warrant for such doctrinal obligation as the basis for an ecumenical council’s decision. ARCIC notes that these definitions are not open to disagreement if full communion is restored between the two Churches: ‘Roman Catholics find it hard to envisage a restoration of communion in which acceptance of certain doctrines would be requisite for some and not for others’ [63]. But then, on the other hand, the importance of these dogmas should not be exaggerated and should be viewed in the light of the agreed *Theotókos* doctrine. The doctrinal presentation of the dogmas in this predestinarian, eschatological way is thought to be a means of gaining common agreement in a mutual ‘re-reception’ involving a regrounding of the dogmas as seen in new, less harsh, light. The doctrine of the sinlessness of Mary is rooted in divine grace, for example, rather than in a miraculously sinless nature different to ours. ARCIC argues that this reinterpretation of the papal dogmas would then clear the path for acceptance of Roman Catholic Marian doctrine and devotion, to which ARCIC now returns.

Possible questions to consider

Does the perfected, ideal, obedient human discipleship of Mary depicted in ARCIC possibly obscure the significance to Christians of the humanity of Jesus, in which we share by baptism and faith?

How might the role of Mary as the type and representative of the Church be accommodated to that of Christ as ‘head of the body’, and as the bridegroom of the bride?

Is there a danger of equating sex with sinful behaviour in some of the language about the purity of Mary in her role of ‘ever virgin’, and does this do justice to the Christian view of creation?

Do you find the way ARCIC presents Mary and the Roman Catholic doctrines about her in the light of divine calling and hope offers a possible way to overcome existing disagreements about her role?

D MARY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Mary’s ‘Amen’ to God’s ‘Yes’ in Christ includes her role in the historical and in the eschatological family of Jesus. Anglicans have focused on her ministry in the example given in Scripture of her obedience and discipleship. Roman Catholics, expanding on

this, have ‘given prominence to the ongoing ministry of Mary in the economy of grace and the communion of saints. Mary points people to Christ, commending them to him and helping them to share his life’ [65]. For most Anglicans, the role of the Holy Spirit is expressed in precisely these terms; a point not considered by ARCIC. Mary is agreed to be the fullest example of the life of grace, she is alive in Christ and we should walk together with her, Christ’s foremost disciple.

Mary has a special place in the history of salvation and so in liturgical and private prayer, prayers are said with her, as with the saints, constantly praying before God. This brings ARCIC to the issue of intercession and mediation in the communion of saints, a practice known to the Anglo-Catholic wing of Anglicanism, but hardly in general. The practice of asking Mary to intercede grew after the declaration of her being declared *Theotókos*. The prayer ‘Hail Mary’ had the final phrase added in the 15th Century, ‘pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death’, and is often taken by evangelicals to indicate a lack of confidence in the finished work of Christ as sufficient for salvation. Reformers rejected the invocation of the saints as obscuring the clarity of the mediation of Christ and the Spirit; Article XXII asserting the idea has no warrant in Scripture. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent and Vatican II on the other hand teach that such prayer is harmless and indeed helpful if made through Christ. The role of Mary as maternal towards the whole human race becomes the way this is commended by ARCIC, not obscuring or diminishing the unique mediation of Christ [67]. The Roman Catholic position is presented now as the moderate centre ground, neither exaggerating nor minimising Mary’s role. Obviously the need for such a maternal mediation, and the question whether it does not inevitably make Mary the sympathetic figure who can and will pass on our all too human requests to the now rather severe Christ, arises in the Anglican reader’s mind.

ARCIC argues that all ministries of the Church use human means, but that this mediation does not lessen that of Christ. The prayer of the Church stands in Christ, not as a parallel prayer, and is enabled by the Holy Spirit. Asking friends to pray for us does not conflict with Christ’s work, but is a ‘means whereby this can be displayed’ [68]. Stretching this point further, we pray in the company of the faithful both here and departed, and for some this intuition of the presence of departed friends deepens a sense of being in Christ across time and in solidarity with the saints, especially with Mary [69]. We are bidden in Scripture to ask others to pray for us, and we can again stretch this to the faithful departed in the body of Christ; requests for assistance in prayer can be made to holy members of the communion of saints [70]. This notion is not directly found in Scripture, but on the other hand is not unscriptural, argues ARCIC, not discussing the Old Testament tradition against making contact with the dead. ARCIC teaches that no practice must obscure the trinitarian economy of grace.

‘The distinctive ministry of Mary’ [71] is that of assisting others through her active prayer; many experience empathy and solidarity with her especially when her historical life parallels theirs. This ministry again seems to echo that of the Paraclete and Holy Spirit. In suffering she represents a figure of tenderness and compassion. She is also the mother of humanity, the new Eve. We may come to see her as such [72], although it must be said equally that many do not. Many [73] find this devotion enriches their worship of

God and local customs should be respected, including apparitions of Mary, which become focal points of spiritual comfort, and of course were greatly encouraged by Pope John Paul II. This kind of cult is classified as private devotion, and is deemed to be not required [73] of the faithful, merely permitted and respected – a classification which most Anglicans would request for a good deal of what ARCIC commends. The liberationist note found in the Magnificat finds a place [74], that is to say the orientation of Mary's historical life and commitment can arguably chime in with the Christian imperative to focus especially on the plight of the poor, displaced and hopeless. In conclusion ARCIC thinks no reason now exists for disagreement on this matter, given its theological re-reception argued above.

ARCIC has sought to explain what Roman Catholics believe about Mary and why they offer prayer and devotion to her in heaven, and expect her to provide protection and sympathetic care, indeed to offer her presence to Christians across time and space, as Pope John Paul II very obviously did. ARCIC explains that Roman Catholics would not find it difficult to accept Anglicans into full communion if they could not agree to the full scope of Roman Catholic Marian piety, preferring instead a kind of 'live and let live' approach to which they are used on such matters in their own communion. ARCIC has certainly striven to show that Scripture has a range of material on Mary, and that it can be read as containing symbolism which in turn can be used to justify Roman Catholic belief and practice. It might be worth pointing out that another Anglican agreed statement, for some reason rather neglected, could be said to have reached a similar conclusion. The Anglican – Orthodox Dublin Agreed Statement 1984 contains this paragraph:

All prayer is ultimately addressed to the Trinitarian God. We pray to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Church is united in a single movement of worship with the Church in heaven, with the Blessed Virgin Mary, 'with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven'. The Orthodox also pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Theotokos and the saints as friends and living images of Christ. (p 34, para 66)

There is no doubt that much hangs on this view of the Church spanning earth and heaven, our communion with those who have gone before, and the legitimacy of contacting these heavenly disciples in glory for help and comfort here and now.

Possible questions to consider

Should ARCIC have included some reference to the feminist cultural and theological movements in relation to Mary and 're-reception' of Marian dogmas?

Is the role of Mary as sympathetic maternal figure in heaven a help to feminist Christians? Do Anglicans miss the comforts offered by this glorified maternal figure?

Is ARCIC open to theological criticism in rarely speaking of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and explaining that in relation to the similar role presented for Mary now in helping disciples?

Should ARCIC have discussed actual incidences of Marian piety, together with their social and political contexts, such as those of Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugore, especially in the light of their importance to Pope John Paul II?

Should Anglicans be allowed to respect Marian dogmas symbolically while not accepting them literally?

CONCLUSION

ARCIC offers this proposal as a means whereby Anglicans can try to understand or ‘get inside’ Roman Catholic doctrines, dogmas and piety concerning Mary. For some Anglicans of the more ‘catholic’ persuasion this will already seem very familiar and congenial. For others, probably the majority, it will seem strange, particularly the last two sections as they expand upon the New Testament and patristic theological doctrines.

Evangelicals will be greatly interested in the initial scriptural section, as well as committed to the *Theotókos* title for Mary, institutionalised by Chalcedon. They may find it hard to relate to the expansion of Mary as earthly mother of Jesus into Mary as ‘metaphysical’ or heavenly maternal figure for all the world, and in touch with disciples across time and space. And Evangelicals retain the concern to focus on Christ as the great high priest whose humanity has passed into the heavens on our behalf, our new Adam, our new ‘covenant head’. Mary’s role as the ideal type or representative of the Church seems to shadow this Christological ministry and this will stimulate important discussion.

Liberal Anglicans will often be happy to theologise in terms of the symbolic meaning of narratives and the experience of the Church today. They will no doubt be concerned about possible obligatory status for Marian doctrines or dogmas for which the evidence is primarily that of spirituality. The issue of authority will be of interest to all Anglicans, especially since they are used to living in a pluralistic kind of Church content to embrace friendly disagreement on secondary matters. There is no doubt that ARCIC has been honest in producing a document in basically a Roman Catholic mode so that Anglicans can get the feel of what is being needed by Roman Catholics in any reunited Church.

Mary herself, whatever her present role in heaven, must be saddened to know she is a focus of disagreement, and has been used as a badge of division between Christians. She surely will be rejoicing that efforts are being made to remedy this.

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