



You have said that “the joint studies done since 1970 by the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) have repeatedly found that issues which have historically divided Anglicans and Roman Catholics are generally more a matter of disagreement concerning the proper source of dogmatic definition than disagreement about the actual content of belief and the theology of the subject itself...i.e. a question of who has been given authority by Christ to define a dogma (an official explanation of *how* a doctrine happens, acceptance of which the Roman Catholic Church since 1870 has taught is necessary to salvation).”

It would seem that the divisions between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism basically come down to the issue of the Papacy. What is the status of the ARCIC agreement on the place of the Bishop of Rome in the Christian Church?

It is true that the divisions between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism have more and more been shown to be a question of the place of Papal authority, not the content of the two Churches' beliefs about the Catholic Faith. This is not surprising because, as one Anglican historian has written, the bitter doctrinal divisions of the Protestant Reformation are not – and never were – our battles.

Since 1970, ARCIC (the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission) has issued three agreed statements on Authority in the Church. There is much common agreement about the nature of the teaching authority of the Church (the *Magisterium*). Nevertheless the dogmatic definition of the First Vatican Council in 1870 of the Bishop of Rome as the dominically-instituted, absolute, Universal Primate who is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals – acceptance of which according to Roman Catholic teaching is necessary to salvation – continues to be a barrier between the two Churches.

The third ARCIC agreed statement on Authority in the Church, issued in 1998,

- 1) calls on Anglicans to be open to and desire the recovery and re-reception [re-definition] under certain clear conditions of the exercise of universal primacy by the Bishop of Rome;
- 2) calls on Roman Catholics to be open to and desire a re-reception [re-definition] of the exercise of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

While ARCIC's progress on agreement on the office of the Bishop of Rome (the Papacy) has been slow, there has been much discussion since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) within the Roman Catholic Church itself about the nature of the Papacy among theologians and Bishops. Many of them hold that the First Vatican Council merely *began* the process of defining the nature of the Papacy, a process which will only be whole and complete when the additional, complementary teaching of the Second Vatican Council is fully received and implemented. Thus, they say, to see the Papacy solely in the terms of the pre-Vatican II understanding of the dogmatic definition of the First Vatican Council is to have a one-sided, incomplete, unbalanced, and even distorted view of the office of Bishop of Rome.

Because of these ongoing discussions among Roman Catholic theologians and Bishops, I asked a friend, Fr Jared Wicks, S.J., a distinguished Roman Catholic theologian, to respond to this question. Father Wicks – for many years professor of theology then Dean of Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and now Consultor on the staff of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity (the Vatican department for ecumenism) – writes:

“Ten years ago, on May 25, 1995, Pope John Paul II issued a weighty encyclical letter, *Ut unum sint* (“That they may be one,” St John 17.21), expressing a renewed Catholic commitment to the ecumenical task of seeking to overcome Christian divisions.

“The letter of a decade ago restated in numerous fresh ways the charter that the Second Vatican Council gave to Catholic ecumenical work in its Decree on Ecumenism (1964). But in 1995, John Paul II made a dramatic step beyond what went before, when he reflected on his own responsibility to contribute to Christian unity. He spoke of the desires of many Christians that he, the successor of Peter, find a way of exercising his primacy of teaching and governing that is ‘open to a new situation,’ namely, the situation of the churches after thirty years of committed dialogue in search of agreements and reconciliation of their differing traditions.

“John Paul II invited Church leaders and theologians of all confessions to enter with him into ‘a patient and fraternal dialogue’ on the Papal ministry, to make it more transparently an instrument of unity and not a cause of division. This is needed for the good of the Christian faith in the world and for the vigor of our witness to Christ in the world.

“The papal invitation of 1995 stirred much comment. A series of ecumenical meetings have been held to study the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome. One promising light was turned on by the work of Fr Michael J. Buckley (Boston College). He proposed that we study afresh a text of the First Vatican Council (1870), which states the finality or purpose of the ‘Petrine’ ministry in terms that have been little noticed for some time.

“This statement of over a century ago identifies *the persons toward whom* the Pope first of all exercises his ministerial service of unity. He is responsible in the first place for promoting the unity in faith and the authenticity of leadership by *the bishops* of the church and then through the bishops leading and guiding the multitude of church members. The Pope is not a monarch ruling all his subjects directly, but a bishop among other bishops, among those who serve as chief pastors in their dioceses. Toward the bishops the Pope has a singular responsibility.

“The First Vatican Council first refers to Jesus instituting the church, ‘in order to render permanent the saving work of redemption’ in a dwelling-place in which ‘all believers should be linked by the bond of one faith and charity.’ Our Lord prayed for the unity of those who would believe in him; he sent his Apostles; and, ‘in like manner it was his will that in his church there should be shepherds and teachers until the end of time.’ From speaking of the Apostles, the First Vatican Council moves quickly to the bishops of the Church who succeed the Apostles. Then it turns to Peter, in order to state what he and his successors contribute for the good of the Church.

“In order, then, that the episcopal office should be one and undivided (*ut vero episcopatus ipse unus et indivisus esset*) and that, by the union of the priests, the whole multitude of believers should be held together in the unity of faith and communion, he [Christ] set blessed Peter over the rest of the Apostles and instituted in him the permanent principle of both unities and their visible foundation.’ (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N. Tanner, pp. 811-812).

“It is no exaggeration to say that for many, even for ecumenical experts, this text has been neglected. The dialogues have not taken into account the Pope’s primary service of the unity of the episcopate as the *means by which* the ‘Petrine’ ministry serves the unity and communion of all the faithful. The ecumenical documents of the past decades have not noted this, namely, that the episcopate is the initial setting and priority of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome.

“To grasp this point, we can think of Jesus’ words to Peter at the Last Supper, in the Gospel of Luke. Peter will deny his Master, but Jesus assures his leading disciple, ‘I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers’ (St Luke 22.32). Peter will be converted afresh when he encounters the Risen Lord. He will then encourage and confirm the other disciples in the Easter faith, which then animates their proclamation and witness as Apostles as they found the churches.

“One also thinks of the radiant and deeply spiritual optimism by which Pope John XXIII animated the Catholic bishops gathered to begin the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Then, after John’s death in June 1963, Pope Paul VI led the same episcopate, wisely and tenaciously, through the rest of the Council, 1963-65. These two Popes led the bishops to work as a body that was ‘one and undivided.’ They strengthened their brother bishops in their faith in Christ as they produced the great teaching documents of the modern Catholic Church.

“So, there is good reason for recalling the helpful placement given by the First Vatican Council to the ‘Petrine’ papal ministry. The aim and purpose of the Pope’s service is being recalled among theologians of the Church and emphasis is being placed on its potential fruitfulness for renewing Catholic presentations of the Petrine role. A new reception of the First Vatican Council’s doctrine of papal primacy will make clear the ‘episcopal finality’ as the guiding principle and foundational interpretation of the papal primacy in teaching and leading the whole Church.

“Now John Paul II has been called to our Lord, and Pope Benedict XVI has succeeded him. But the new Pope has stated clearly that fostering Christian unity is for him a high priority as he begins his new ministry. As Cardinal Ratzinger, the new Pope was present when Fr Buckley first called attention to the clarification given by that forgotten text from 1870. We will watch carefully how Benedict XVI goes to work by word and deed trying to make his new ministry as Peter’s successor a positive influence for the unity of Christ’s followers.”