

# The Secretariat For Promoting Christian Unity

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# RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

## MEETING OF ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION (ARCIC)

(Venice, August 24-September 2, 1976)

The eighth meeting of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission was held at the "Casa Cardinal Piazza" in Venice from August 24th-September 2nd. All the members were present under the Co-Chairmanship of the Rt. Revd. H. R. McAadoo and the Rt. Revd. Alan Clark. Beginning from the basis of the Lordship of Christ the Commission examined the relations of authority first to the Holy Spirit and to Scripture, then to communion of the churches, conciliarity and primacy. Varieties of authority in the Church were considered and particular attention paid to the function of authority as serving the maintenance of the Church in the truth.

A careful consideration of the interplay of primal and conciliar authority revealed a broad and important basis of agreement on the general conception of authority in the Church and in particular on the basic principles of primacy. From this basis the problem of universal primacy was approached and

again a real measure of agreement was discovered on the general principle.

Anglican difficulties on Roman primacy were precisely set out while an attempt was made to ensure that the Catholic doctrines concerned were stated equally accurately.

At the end the Commission felt that the work of the week produced a significant advance on the convergence already achieved in earlier meetings though clearly important difficulties remain to be solved. The Commission has agreed on the terms of a report which is being presented to their respective authorities.

The Commission is deeply grateful to the Patriarch and the church authorities in Venice and to the Sisters at "Casa Cardinal Piazza" for their warm welcome and co-operation. The Commission will meet again at Chichester in a year's time.

(Press release)

## AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

### PREFACE

The Malta Report of the Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission (1968) outlined the large measure of agreement in faith which exists between the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion (§ 7). It then went on to note three specific areas of doctrinal disagreement. These were listed in the Report as matter for joint investigation. Accordingly the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission, proposed by the Report, was recommended to examine jointly "the question of intercommunion, and the related matters of Church and Ministry", and "the question of authority, its nature, exercise and implications".

To our previous Agreed Statements on the Eucharist (Windsor, 1971) and Ministry (Canterbury, 1973) we now add an Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church (Venice, 1976). The Commission thus submits its work to the authorities who appointed it and, with their permission, offers it to our Churches.

The question of authority in the Church has long been recognised as crucial to the growth in unity of the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion. It was precisely in the problem of papal primacy that our historical divisions found their unhappy origin. Hence, however significant our consensus on the doctrine of the Eucharist and of the Ministry, unresolved questions on the nature and exercise of Authority in the Church would hinder the growing experience of unity which is the pattern of our present relations.

The present Statement has, we believe, made a signi-

ficant contribution to the resolution of these questions. Our consensus covers a very wide area; though we have not been able to resolve some of the difficulties of Anglicans concerning Roman Catholic belief relating to the office of the bishop of Rome, we hope and trust that our analysis has placed these problems in a proper perspective.

There is much in the document, as in our other documents, which presents the ideal of the Church as willed by Christ. History shows how the Church has often failed to achieve this ideal. An awareness of this distinction between the ideal and the actual is important both for the reading of the document and for the understanding of the method we have pursued.

The consensus we have reached, if it is to be accepted by our two communities, would have, we insist, important consequences. Common recognition of Roman primacy would bring changes not only to the Anglican Communion but also to the Roman Catholic Church. On both sides the readiness to learn, necessary to the achievement of such a wider *koinonia*, would demand humility and charity. The prospect should be met with faith, not fear. Communion with the see of Rome would bring to the Churches of the Anglican Communion not only a wider *koinonia* but also a strengthening of the power to realise its traditional ideal of diversity in unity. Roman Catholics, on their side, would be enriched by the presence of a particular tradition of spirituality and scholarship, the lack of which has deprived the Roman Catholic Church of a precious element in the Christian heritage. The Roman Catholic Church has much to learn from the Anglican synodical tradition of involving the laity

*in the life and mission of the Church. We are convinced, therefore, that our degree of agreement, which argues for greater communion between our churches, can make a profound contribution to the witness of Christianity in our contemporary society.*

*It is in this light that we would wish to submit our conclusions to our respective authorities, believing that our work, indebted, as it is, to many sources outside the Commission as well as to its own labours, will be of service not only to ourselves but to Christians of other traditions in our common quest for the unity of Christ's Church.*

H. R. McADOO, Bishop of Ossory  
ALAN C. CLARK, Bishop of East Anglia  
Co-Chairmen

January 19, 1977

## AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

### INTRODUCTION

1. The Lordship of Christ.

#### I. CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY

2. The Spirit and the word;  
3. The action of the Spirit.

#### II. AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

4. The authority of holiness;  
5. The authority conferred by special gifts;  
6. The discernment and response of the community;  
7. The inadequacy of human authority.

#### III. AUTHORITY IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCHES

8. Communion among the churches;  
9. Conciliarity;  
10. The emergence of primacy;  
11. Primatial authority;  
12. The primacy of Rome.

#### IV. AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF FAITH

13. Unity in truth;  
14. The expression of truth;  
15. The communication of truth;  
16. Conciliar authority;  
17. The historical importance of the Roman see;  
18. Maintenance of the Church in truth.

#### V. CONCILIAR AND PRIMATIAL AUTHORITY

19. Ecumenical councils;  
20. The exercise of primatial authority;  
21. Primatial authority and diversity;  
22. The balance of authority;  
23. Universal primacy.

#### VI. PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

24. Problems;  
25. Prospects.

### CONCLUSION

26. The next stage.

## AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

### INTRODUCTION

1. The confession of Christ as Lord is the heart of the Christian faith. To him God has given all authority in heaven and on earth. As Lord of the Church he bestows the Holy Spirit to create a communion of men with God and with one another. To bring this *koinonia* to perfection is God's eternal purpose. The Church exists to serve the fulfilment of this purpose when God will be all in all.

#### I. CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY

2. Through the gift of the Spirit the apostolic community came to recognise in the words and deeds of Jesus the saving activity of God and their mission to proclaim to all men the good news of salvation. Therefore they preached Jesus through whom God has spoken finally to men. Assisted by the Holy Spirit they transmitted what they had heard and seen of the life and words of Jesus and their interpretation of his redemptive work. Consequently the inspired documents in which this is related came to be accepted by the Church as a normative record of the authentic foundation of the faith. To these the Church has recourse for the inspiration of its life and mission; to these the Church refers its teaching and practice. Through these written words the authority of the Word of God is conveyed. Entrusted with these documents, the Christian community is enabled by the Holy Spirit to live out the gospel and so to be led into all truth. It is therefore given the capacity to assess its faith and life and to speak to the world in the name of Christ. Shared commitment and belief create a common mind in determining how the gospel should be interpreted and obeyed. By reference to this common faith each person tests the truth of his own belief.

3. The Spirit of the risen Lord, who indwells the Christian community, continues to maintain the people of God in obedience to the Father's will. He safeguards their faithfulness to the revelation of Jesus Christ and equips them for their mission in the world. By this action of the Holy Spirit the authority of the Lord is active in the Church. Through incorporation into Christ and obedience to him Christians are made open to one another and assume mutual obligations. Since the Lordship of Christ is universal, the community also bears a responsibility towards all mankind, which demands participation in all that promotes the good of society and responsiveness to every form of human need. The common life in the body of Christ equips the community and each of its members with what they need to fulfil this responsibility: they are enabled so to live that the authority of Christ will be mediated through them. This is Christian authority: when Christians so act and speak, men perceive the authoritative word of Christ.

## II. AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

4. The Church is a community which consciously seeks to submit to Jesus Christ. By sharing in the life of the Spirit all find within the *koinonia* the means to be faithful to the revelation of their Lord. Some respond more fully to his call; by the inner quality of their life they win a respect which allows them to speak in Christ's name with authority.

5. The Holy Spirit also gives to some individuals and communities special gifts for the benefit of the Church, which entitle them to speak and be heeded (e.g. *Eph* 4, 11, 12; *1 Cor* 12, 4-11.)

Among these gifts of the Spirit for the edification of the Church is the *episkope* of the ordained ministry. There are some whom the Holy Spirit commissions through ordination for service to the whole community. They exercise their authority in fulfilling ministerial functions related to "the apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers" (*Acts* 2, 42). This pastoral authority belongs primarily to the bishop, who is responsible for preserving and promoting the integrity of the *koinonia* in order to further the Church's response to the Lordship of Christ and its commitment to mission. Since the bishop has general oversight of the community, he can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its daily life. He does not, however, act alone. All those who have ministerial authority must recognise their mutual responsibility and interdependence. This service of the Church, officially entrusted only to ordained ministers, is intrinsic to the Church's structure according to the mandate given by Christ and recognised by the community. This is yet another form of authority.

6. The perception of God's will for his Church does not belong only to the ordained ministry but is shared by all its members. All who live faithfully within the *koinonia* may become sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and be brought towards a deeper understanding of the gospel and of its implications in diverse cultures and changing situations. Ordained ministers commissioned to discern these insights and give authoritative expression to them, are part of the community, sharing its quest for understanding the gospel in obedience to Christ and receptive to the needs and concerns of all.

The community, for its part, must respond to and assess the insights and teaching of the ordained ministers. Through this continuing process of discernment and response, in which the faith is expressed and the Gospel is pastorally applied, the Holy Spirit declares the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the faithful may live freely under the discipline of the Gospel.

7. It is by such means as these that the Holy Spirit keeps the Church under the Lordship of Christ who, taking full account of human weakness, has promised never to abandon his people. The authorities in the Church cannot adequately reflect Christ's authority because they are still subject to the limitations and sinfulness of human nature. Awareness of this inadequacy is a continual summons to reform.

## III. AUTHORITY IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCHES

8. The *koinonia* is realised not only in the local Christian communities, but also in the communion of these communities with one another. The unity of local communities under one bishop constitutes what is commonly meant in our two communions by "a local church", though the expression is sometimes used in other ways. Each local church is rooted in the witness of the apostles and entrusted with the apostolic mission. Faithful to the gospel, celebrating the one eucharist and dedicated to the service of the same Lord, it is the Church of Christ. In spite of diversities each local church recognises its own essential features in the others and its true identity with them. The authoritative action and proclamation of the people of God to the world therefore are not simply the responsibilities of each church acting separately, but of all the local churches together. The spiritual gifts of one may be an inspiration to the others. Since each bishop must ensure that the local community is distinctively Christian he has to make it aware of the universal communion of which it is part. The bishop expresses this unity of his church with the others: this is symbolised by the participation of several bishops in his ordination.

9. Ever since the Council of Jerusalem (*Acts* 15) the churches have realised the need to express and strengthen the *koinonia* by coming together to discuss matters of mutual concern and to meet contemporary challenges. Such gatherings may be either regional or world-wide. Through such meetings the Church, determined to be obedient to Christ and faithful to its vocation, formulates its rule of faith and orders its life. In all these councils, whether of bishops only, or of bishops, clergy and laity, decisions are authoritative when they express the common faith and mind of the Church. The decisions of what has traditionally been called an "ecumenical council" are binding upon the whole Church; those of a regional council or synod bind only the churches it represents. Such decrees are to be received by the local churches as expressing the mind of the Church. This exercise of authority, far from being an imposition, is designed to strengthen the life and mission of the local churches and of their members.

10. Early in the history of the Church a function of oversight of the other bishops of their regions was assigned to bishops of prominent sees. Concern to keep the churches faithful to the will of Christ was among the considerations which contributed to this development. This practice has continued to the present day. This form of *episkope* is a service to the Church carried out in co-responsibility with all the bishops of the region; for every bishop receives at ordination both responsibility for his local church and the obligation to maintain it in living awareness and practical service of the other churches. The Church of God is found in each of them and in their *koinonia*.

11. The purpose of *koinonia* is the realisation of the will of Christ: "Father, keep them in the name,

which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one... so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17, 11, 21). The bishop of a principal see should seek the fulfilment of this will of Christ in the churches of his region. It is his duty to assist the bishops to promote in their churches right teaching, holiness of life, brotherly unity and the Church's mission to the world. When he perceives a serious deficiency in the life or mission of one of the churches he is bound, if necessary, to call the local bishop's attention to it and to offer assistance. There will also be occasions when he has to assist other bishops to reach a common mind with regard to their shared needs and difficulties. Sharing together and active mutual concern are indispensable to the churches' effective witness to Christ.

12. It is within the context of this historical development that the see of Rome, whose prominence was associated with the death there of Peter and Paul, eventually became the principal centre in matters concerning the Church universal.

The importance of the bishop of Rome among his brother bishops, as explained by analogy with the position of Peter among the apostles, was interpreted as Christ's will for his Church.

On the basis of this analogy the First Vatican Council affirmed that this service was necessary to the unity of the whole Church. Far from overriding the authority of the bishops in their own dioceses, this service was explicitly intended to support them in their ministry of oversight. The Second Vatican Council placed this service in the wider context of the shared responsibility of all the bishops. The teaching of these councils shows that communion with the bishop of Rome does not imply submission to an authority which would stifle the distinctive features of the local churches. The purpose of this episcopal function of the bishop of Rome is to promote Christian fellowship in faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles.

The theological interpretation of this primacy and the administrative structures through which it has been exercised have varied considerably through the centuries. Neither theory nor practice, however, has ever fully reflected these ideals. Sometimes functions assumed by the see of Rome were not necessarily linked to the primacy: sometimes the conduct of the occupant of this see has been unworthy of his office: sometimes the image of this office has been obscured by interpretations placed upon it: and sometimes external pressures have made its proper exercise almost impossible. Yet the primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his oversight in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and one another. Communion with him is intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church, and as a sign of the communion of all the churches.

#### IV. AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF FAITH

13. A local church cannot be truly faithful to Christ if it does not desire to foster universal communion, the embodiment of that unity for which

Christ prayed. This communion is founded on faith in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, crucified, risen, ascended and now living through his Spirit in the Church. Every local church must therefore ever seek a deeper understanding and clearer expression of this common faith, both of which are threatened when churches are isolated by division.

14. The Church's purpose in its proclamation is to lead mankind to accept God's saving work in Christ, an acceptance which not only requires intellectual assent but also demands the response of the whole person. In order to clarify and transmit what is believed and to build up and safeguard the Christian life, the Church has found the formulation of creeds, conciliar definitions, and other statements of belief indispensable. But these are always instrumental to the truth which they are intended to convey.

15. The Church's life and work are shaped by its historical origins, by its subsequent experience and by its endeavour to make the relevance of the gospel plain to every generation. Through reflexion upon the Word, through the proclamation of the gospel, through baptism, through worship, especially the eucharist, the people of God are moved to the living remembrance of Jesus Christ and of the experience and witness of the apostolic community. This remembrance supports and guides them in their search for language which will effectively communicate the meaning of the gospel.

All generations and cultures must be helped to understand that the good news of salvation is also for them. It is not enough for the Church simply to repeat the original apostolic words. It has also prophetically to translate them in order that the hearers in their situation may understand and respond to them. All such restatement must be consonant with the apostolic witness recorded in the Scriptures; for in this witness the preaching and teaching of ministers, and statements of local and universal councils, have to find their ground and consistency. Although these clarifications are conditioned by the circumstances which prompted them, some of their perceptions may be of lasting value. In this process the Church itself may come to see more clearly the implications of the gospel. This is why the Church has endorsed certain formulas as authentic expressions of its witness, whose significance transcends the setting in which they were first formulated. This is not to claim that these formulas are the only possible, or even the most exact, way of expressing the faith, or that they can never be improved. Even when a doctrinal definition is regarded by the Christian community as part of its permanent teaching, this does not exclude subsequent restatement. Although the categories of thought and the mode of expression may be superseded, restatement always builds upon, and does not contradict, the truth intended by the original definition.

16. Local councils held from the second century determined the limits of the New Testament, and gave to the Church a canon which has remained normative. The action of a council in making such a decision on so momentous a matter implies an assurance that the Lord himself is present when his people

assemble "in his name" (Mt 18, 20), and that a council may say, "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15, 28). The conciliar mode of authority exercised in the matter of the canon has also been applied to questions of discipline and of fundamental doctrine. When decisions (as at Nicaea in 325) affect the entire Church and deal with controverted matters which have been widely and seriously debated, it is important to establish criteria for the recognition and reception of conciliar definitions and disciplinary decisions. A substantial part in the process of reception is played by the subject matter of the definitions and by the response of the faithful. This process is often gradual, as the decisions come to be seen in perspective through the Spirit's continuing guidance of the whole Church.

17. Among the complex historical factors which contributed to the recognition of conciliar decisions considerable weight attached to their confirmation by the principal sees, and in particular by the see of Rome. At an early period other local churches actively sought the support and approbation of the church in Rome; and in course of time the agreement of the Roman see was regarded as necessary to the general acceptance of synodal decisions in major matters of more than regional concern, and also, eventually, to their canonical validity. By their agreement or disagreement the local church of Rome and its bishop fulfilled their responsibility towards other local churches and their bishops for maintaining the whole church in the truth. In addition the bishop of Rome was also led to intervene in controversies relating to matters of faith—in most cases in response to appeals made to him, but sometimes on his own initiative.

18. In its mission to proclaim and safeguard the gospel the Church has the obligation and the competence to make declarations in matters of faith. This mission involves the whole people of God, among whom some may rediscover or perceive more clearly than others certain aspects of the saving truth. At times there result conflict and debate. Customs, accepted positions, beliefs, formulations and practices, as well as innovations and re-interpretations, may be shown to be inadequate, mistaken or even inconsistent with the gospel. When conflict endangers unity or threatens to distort the gospel the Church must have effective means for resolving it.

In both our traditions the appeal to Scripture, to the creeds, to the Fathers and to the definitions of the councils of the early Church is regarded as basic and normative.<sup>1</sup> But the bishops have a special responsibility for promoting truth and discerning error, and the interaction of bishop and people in its exercise is a safeguard of Christian life and fidelity. The teaching of the faith and the ordering of life in the Christian community require a daily exercise of this responsibility; but there is no guarantee that those who have an everyday responsibility will—any more than other members—invariably be free from errors of judgement, will never tolerate abuses and will never distort the truth. Yet, in Christian hope, we are confident that such failures cannot destroy the Church's ability to proclaim the gospel and to show

forth the Christian life; for we believe that Christ will not desert his Church and that the Holy Spirit will lead it into all truth. That is why the Church, in spite of its failures, can be described as indefectible.

## V. CONCILIAR AND PRIMATIAL AUTHORITY

19. In times of crisis or when fundamental matters of faith are in question, the Church can make judgements, consonant with Scripture, which are authoritative. When the Church meets in ecumenical council its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous. Through the Holy Spirit the Church commits itself to these judgements, recognising that, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with Tradition, they are by the same Spirit protected from error. They do not add to the truth but, although not exhaustive, they clarify the Church's understanding of it. In discharging this responsibility bishops share in a special gift of Christ to his Church. Whatever further clarification or interpretation may be propounded by the Church, the truth expressed will always be confessed. This binding authority does not belong to every conciliar decree, but only to those which formulate the central truths of salvation. This authority is ascribed in both our traditions to decisions of the ecumenical councils of the first centuries.<sup>2</sup>

20. The bishops are collectively responsible for defending and interpreting the apostolic faith. The primacy accorded to a bishop implies that, after consulting his fellow bishops, he may speak in their name and express their mind. The recognition of his position by the faithful creates an expectation that on occasion he will take an initiative in speaking for the Church. Primatial statements are only one way by which the Holy Spirit keeps the people of God faithful to the truth of the gospel.

21. If primacy is to be a genuine expression of *episkope* it will foster the *koinonia* by helping the bishops in their task of apostolic leadership both in their local church and in the Church universal. Primacy fulfils its purpose by helping the churches to listen to one another, to grow in love and unity, and to strive together towards the fulness of Christian life and witness; it respects and promotes Christian freedom and spontaneity; it does not seek uniformity where diversity is legitimate, or centralise administration to the detriment of local churches.

A primate exercises his ministry not in isolation but in collegial association with his brother bishops. His intervention in the affairs of a local church should not be made in such a way as to usurp the responsibility of its bishop.

22. Although primacy and conciliarity are complementary elements of *episkope* it has often happened that one has been emphasised at the expense of the other, even to the point of serious imbalance. When churches have been separated from one another the danger has been increased. The *koinonia* between churches requires that a proper balance of the church between the two with the responsibility be preserved of the whole people of God in responsible participation

23. If God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, this general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episkope* serving the *koinonia* of the churches needs to be realised at the universal level. The only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such *episkope* is the see of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died.

It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see.

## VI. PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

24. What we have written here amounts to a consensus on authority in the Church and, in particular, on the basic principles of primacy. This consensus is of fundamental importance. While it does not wholly resolve all the problems associated with papal primacy, it provides us with a solid basis for confronting them. It is when we move from these basic principles to particular claims of papal primacy and to its exercise that problems arise, the gravity of which will be variously judged:

a) Claims on behalf of the Roman see as commonly presented in the past have put a greater weight on the Petrine texts (*Mt* 16: 18, 19; *Lk* 22: 31, 32; *Jn* 21: 15-17) than they are generally thought to be able to bear. However, many Roman Catholic scholars do not now feel it necessary to stand by former exegesis of these texts in every respect.

b) The First Vatican Council of 1870 uses the language of "divine right" of the successors of Peter. This language has no clear interpretation in modern Roman Catholic theology. If it is understood as affirming that the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome is part of God's design for the universal *koinonia* then it need not be a matter of disagreement. But if it were further implied that as long as a church is not in communion with the bishop of Rome, it is regarded by the Roman Catholic church as less than fully a church, a difficulty would remain: for some this difficulty would be removed by simply restoring communion, but to others the implication would itself be an obstacle to entering into communion with Rome.

c) Anglicans find grave difficulty in the affirmation that the pope can be infallible in his teaching. It must, however, be borne in mind that the doctrine of infallibility<sup>3</sup> is hedged round by very rigorous conditions laid down at the First Vatican Council. These conditions preclude the idea that the pope is an inspired oracle communicating fresh revelation, or that he can speak independently of his fellow bishops and the Church, or on matters not concerning faith or morals. For the Roman Catholic Church the pope's dogmatic definitions, which, fulfilling the criteria of infallibility, are preserved from error, do no more but no less than express the mind of the Church on issues concerning the divine revelation. Even so, special difficulties are created by the recent Marian dogmas, because Anglicans doubt the appropriateness,

or even the possibility, of defining them as essential to the faith of believers.

d) The claim that the pope possesses universal immediate jurisdiction, the limits of which are not clearly specified, is a source of anxiety to Anglicans who fear that the way is thus open to its illegitimate or uncontrolled use. Nevertheless, the First Vatican Council intended that the papal primacy should be exercised only to maintain and never to erode the structures of the local churches. The Roman Catholic church is today seeking to replace the juridical outlook of the nineteenth century by a more pastoral understanding of authority in the Church.

25. In spite of the difficulties just mentioned, we believe that this Statement on Authority in the Church represents a significant convergence with far-reaching consequences. For a considerable period theologians in our two traditions, without compromising their respective allegiances, have worked on common problems with the same methods. In the process they have come to see old problems in new horizons and have experienced a theological convergence which has often taken them by surprise.

In our three Agreed Statements we have endeavoured to get behind the opposed and entrenched positions of past controversies. We have tried to reassess what are the real issues to be resolved. We have often deliberately avoided the vocabulary of past polemics, not with any intention of evading the real difficulties that provoked them, but because the emotive associations of such language have often obscured the truth. For the future relations between our churches the doctrinal convergence which we have experienced offers hope that remaining difficulties can be resolved.

## CONCLUSION

26. The Malta Report of 1968 envisaged the coming together of the Roman Catholic church and the churches of the Anglican Communion in terms of "unity by stages". We have reached agreements on the doctrines of the Eucharist, Ministry, and, apart from the qualifications of § 24, Authority. Doctrinal agreements reached by theological commissions cannot, however, by themselves achieve the goal of Christian unity. Accordingly, we submit our Statements to our respective authorities to consider whether or not they are judged to express on these central subjects a unity at the level of faith which not only justifies but requires action to bring about a closer sharing between our two Communion in life, worship and mission.

<sup>1</sup> This is emphasised in the Anglican tradition. Cf. The Lambeth Conferences of 1948 and 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Since our historical divisions, the Roman Catholic Church has continued the practice of holding general councils of its bishops, some of which it has designated as ecumenical. The churches of the Anglican Communion have developed other forms of conciliarity.

<sup>3</sup> "Infallibility" is a technical term which does not bear precisely the same meaning as the word does in common usage. Its theological sense is seen in §§ 15 and 19 above.



The particular difficulties of the present subject and the importance of an exact understanding of the commission's method of work have led the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity to judge it useful to offer with the statement a comment. It has asked one of its consultors, the Rev. Christophe Dumont, O.P., not himself a member of ARCIC, for that comment. His critical analysis is in no way an official comment of the Secretariat. It is only the reaction of one Catholic theologian to this text.

### Structure of the document

1. This is determined by its purpose—to show in what terms Catholics and Anglicans can set down together their common faith about the existence, nature, forms and conditions of exercise of an authority in the Church, starting from the shared conviction that there is no other authority, whether of the Church or in the Church, than that of Christ himself, exercised ministerially by men.

2. The method adopted is *inductive*. It starts from facts evident at various stages of the Church's life, and tries to discern on the one hand their continuity with the order of the Christian community in the apostolic age, and on the other hand the developments called for by the expansion and institutional growth of the Church through the ages, in changing historical circumstances and within different cultures. Following this path the statement is constantly concerned to show the identity, or the proximity, or the convergence of the views commonly accepted within each communion.

An important feature of the method is that it scrupulously avoids the technical language of the schools: the consensus sought for bears on the faith itself, and not on different possible theological interpretations or adaptations to a system.

### 3. The plan of the document

The *introduction* (§ 1) fixes firmly the starting point: our common faith in the Lordship of Christ, from whom all exercise of Church authority comes through the gift of the Spirit.

The *first part* deals with the authority of the Christian community as a whole, beginning from the apostolic community which, through the light of the Holy Spirit has recognised the saving action of Christ and its own mission to proclaim this good news to the whole world (§ 2). From this the whole community derives a responsibility which, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, creates mutual obligations between its different parts (§ 3).

The *second part* treats of authority in the Church, at the service of these mutual obligations. There is first an allusion to the authority which comes from holiness of life (§ 4). But authority derives also from *special gifts* given by the Holy Spirit so that the Church may discharge her mission; among these, the gift of *episkope* conferred on *ordained ministers* (§ 5). Responsibility for oversight is not a monopoly of the latter:

the community as a whole shares in it when it exercises discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whether responding with docility or with constructive criticism (§ 6). In any case authority, assumed ministerially by men, can never be exercised in the Church in a way which reflects adequately the authority of Christ himself (§ 7).

The *third part* looks at the exercise of authority as serving the communion between churches. The key word here is *koinonia*, first defined separately and in general terms (§ 8) then viewed in relation to two principal forms of the exercise of authority: (a view which allows the term to be used consistently) a collective form, *conciliarity* (§ 9) and a more personal form, the *primatial*. The *emergence* of the latter in the course of history is first brought out (§ 10) then its exercise within a restricted group of local churches (§ 11) and finally its exercise on a world-wide and universal level: the primacy of Rome (§ 12).

The *fourth part* considers the exercise of authority in relation to its principal object: the safeguarding of the faith—and of the same faith for everybody. The importance for *koinonia* of communion in professing the truth is underlined (§ 13). In the course of history this truth has found expression in creeds, conciliar utterances and the like (§ 14). It must be communicated in a way which will be understood by those who are to receive and practice it and this calls for continual adaptation to the ways of understanding of different times and cultures (§ 15). Throughout all those different modes of transmission the truth must remain faithful to itself: this has been assured by councils whose authority cannot be contested once their decisions, expressing the apostolic faith, have been received as such by the whole community at all its levels (§ 16). In the history of this recognition of councils, the reception and sanction given them by the see of Rome has played an important part (§ 17).

The mandate of authority is, very specifically, to maintain the Church in the truth. This is achieved by the interplay of two forces—primatial authority and the common understanding of the faithful. This interaction, which depends on the general guidance of the Holy Spirit, is necessary by reason of the weakness and liability to sin of those who exercise authority.

The *fifth part* examines the relations which should (§ 18) exist between the conciliar and primatial exercises of authority. The ecumenical councils are dealt with first (§ 19), then the necessarily collective character of all primatial authority (§ 20) which should not seek uniformity (§ 21), hence the need for a just balance between the two forms (§ 22) which should be realised also on the higher plane of the *koinonia of all the Churches* (§ 23).

The *sixth part*, the last, begins with the *problems* raised by the previous considerations on authority and its exercise. The joint commission is convinced it has reached a *basic* consensus on these matters but recognises that the consensus carries with it certain reserves.

a) Catholics give in general a meaning to the *Petrine texts* of scripture which seems to go beyond what they will objectively bear; this is the Anglican view, but would be shared by many Catholic exegetes today.

b) The expression *divine right* which the Catholic Church says is the foundation of the primacy of the see of Rome, can be understood in two different ways only one of which is declared admissible; it remains for the Catholic Church to declare itself on the meaning of this expression, because on it depends the restoration of unity between the two parties in this dialogue.

c) the notion of the *infallibility* of the bishop of Rome presents a difficulty in the eyes of Anglicans; they have been reminded not to overlook the limits and conditions which both Vatican councils have placed on its exercise.

d) the same must be said of the immediate universal jurisdiction of the pope; but Anglicans are asked not to lose sight of the purpose governing the exercise of this jurisdiction, nor of the effort within the Church since Vatican II to replace the juridical conception of this form of papal responsibility with a more pastoral one (§ 24).

Finally looking at "prospects", the statement draws a first conclusion from what has gone before; there is a convergence between the Catholic and Anglican views of authority and the forms and conditions of its exercise. Together with the two statements previously submitted for the approval of the respective authorities—those on Eucharist and Ministry—the present document allows us to hope that a solution of the remaining difficulties is possible (§ 25).

By way of *conclusion* the statement is submitted to the judgement and approval of the authorities of the two communions in the expectation, not only that the measure of agreement already achieved will be ratified by them but that, on this basis, they will take measures to promote a closer sharing of the two communions in the life, worship and mission of the Church (§ 26, "the next step").

## I. OVERALL APPRECIATION

The document *commends itself* for these reasons:

a) Its exclusively biblical language, which avoids any particular theological interpretation of the two key-words used: *episkope* and *koinonia*.

b) The scrupulously progressive character of the argument, which leads us as though by the hand from the Lordship of Christ (the foundation of all authority whether *of* or *in* the Church) to a universal primacy of the see of Rome, without omitting on the way any of the stages in the structure of the exercise of authority in the Church. There is also a clear concern to take the Holy Spirit as model and as guide on the way.

c) Its concern to leave nothing out of account in considering authority, whether of its different *depositories* (the faithful, ordained ministers, bishops, patriarchs, councils, the bishop of Rome) its different *grounds* (holiness of life, special gifts of the Holy Spirit,

ordination) or its different *levels* (local, regional, universal).

d) Throughout it *rightly associates* the Christological and the pneumatological aspects of the exercise of authority: the former is strongly emphasised by the basic reference to the lordship of Christ, but this lordship is shown to be exercised in the Church only through the action of the Holy Spirit.

e) The place given to Scripture and tradition as necessary points of reference for all exercise of authority in its object and in its manner. At the same time the idea of tradition itself seems less worked out than in a previous draft of the document—perhaps for fear of putting too narrow a theological interpretation on it.

f) Its concern to bring out the *eminently pastoral purpose of the exercise of authority*: the two-fold responsibility of *episkope* (in its various forms and at its various levels) to safeguard the faith in its apostolic authenticity and, on the basis of that, to maintain the local and universal *koinonia*.

*To sum up*: A first reading of the document produces a most favourable impression: that of a very fine and vigorous theological synthesis likely to persuade the Anglican on sound grounds, in view of the mission of the Church, that a universal ministry of *episkope* rests traditionally with the bishop of Rome. In this respect one cannot hesitate to call the paper remarkable. None the less, as in the council debates not long ago, to this *valde placet* we have to add our *attamen*, suggesting some reserves. In fact both because of its method, little known in Catholic theology, and because of some of its assertions, the document is likely at first reading to provoke some astonishment. Hence the pointers which I shall now offer for a just assessment.

## II. INDICATIONS FOR AN EVALUATION

a) Clearly one cannot judge the value of this document merely by the fact that it is likely to create astonishment. It was a good thing that the compilers should take care to express themselves in a way not open to misinterpretation, but it was not reasonable to expect that the document itself should carry a clear and total justification of everything it puts forward as a truth. This is not its purpose, and its value cannot be fairly appreciated unless we realise its proper place or scope. It is a stage in the dialogue between two definite communions, the Anglican and the Roman Catholic; and the aim is, very specifically, to bring out what these have in common as convictions *of faith* about the conception and exercise of authority in the Church, as the Lord intended to establish it and have it live. The statement sets out then from these shared convictions, laid down as so many facts which there is no need to make good since they are sufficiently manifest and recognised.

b) Further, if some passages of the document can be singled out as objects of the possible astonishment I mentioned earlier, these passages are not in themselves enough to account for the astonishment. For the most part it will be caused by a regrettable lack of information about the amount of progress in

theological research within the Catholic Church. It needs to be remembered that long before Vatican II many of the most authoritative Catholic theologians, those most conscious of the demands of sound method, were already scrutinising the acts of the most important councils, particularly Trent and Vatican I, and had begun to disentangle rigorously the precise sense of the texts promulgated as these had been discussed, understood and intended by the council fathers themselves. Ecumenical collaboration, of which the document we are considering is a fruit, has undoubtedly stimulated this sort of research, enriching it without necessarily setting it on wrong lines. In any case the statement takes account of the fruits of such research only to the extent that they are matter of agreement between our respective communions, since it is concerned only with their dialogue. That there are elements of conjecture and anticipation in handling such material is something that needs to be borne in mind in an objective assessment. What follows should be read in the light of these two preliminary observations.

### 1. *The character of the method used*

The document has no need to justify faith in the lordship of Christ or in the active and efficacious presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church: it starts from convictions of faith indisputably shared by our two communions on these fundamental points. At each of its stages it shows a growth in awareness, on either side, of what both sides discern as following from these primary convictions, on the basis of the witness of Scripture.

Such a proceeding is characteristic of the "inductive" method which sets out from known facts to arrive at principles. It is a method which certainly risks astonishing not only the simple faithful but also many bishops who were catechised or taught theology in the opposite way: starting from texts presented as "authorities" (Scripture or documents of the *magisterium*) the truths to be believed and the virtues to be practised were deduced. On the assumption that the total content of revelation was clearly known to the apostles, the conclusion drawn was that the New Testament contained, at least implicitly, the theoretical and practical forms which the Roman Catholic Church, in the course of time and under pressure of circumstances but helped by the Holy Spirit and always by way of a homogeneous, deductive development of doctrine, had been led to give to its exercise of authority. Hence the scriptural foundation (the Petrine texts) put forward, as fully normative, for the universal primacy of jurisdiction and the doctrinal infallibility of the bishop of Rome, sanctioned as dogmatic truths by conciliar definitions. It is difficult to imagine that those who have received this kind of teaching will not be somewhat abashed by the different method of the document, being led to think that the abandonment of the deductive method, which is regarded as traditional, entails ipso facto the abandonment of its conclusions.

In fact, to oppose so sharply the inductive method of our document and the deductive method hitherto

current in catechesis and theological teaching would be to see neither in its full reality. If the inductive method is more manifest in the statement and the deductive in the kind of teaching hitherto dominant, in neither case is one used exclusively. If the statement starts from a consideration of the historical development of the forms of exercise of primacy in the Church, it none the less justifies the authority which invests these forms by an appeal to the normative data of Scripture. Conversely, if traditional teaching of theology in the Catholic Church starts straight off from Scripture texts, it justifies the weight it gives to the texts by recourse to the interpretation given in the living tradition since the apostles—something which is itself an established fact and the object of historical development. It turns out that there is still a deductive element inherent in the inductive method followed by the statement, and in turn an inductive element in the "traditional" deductive way. In either case the point of departure and the foundation of authority in the Church is certainly the mandate given by Christ and witnessed to in Scripture; not the community itself, whose role and duty is on the contrary to recognise it. A passage in the document makes this clear:

"This service of the Church, officially entrusted only to ordained ministers, is intrinsic to the Church's structure according to the mandate given by Christ and recognised by the community" (§ 5).

### 2. *Is the episcopate of the esse of the Church?*

It should be emphasised that the lines just quoted are particularly important if they imply recognition by the Anglican members of the Commission that the sacramental hierarchical structure of the Church is necessary to the *esse* of the Church and not merely to its *bene esse* and this by virtue not of a decision of the Christian community, the Church itself, but of a mandate given by Christ. It goes without saying that the agreement the Commission says it has reached cannot be regarded as such if there is any ambiguity in interpreting this passage. It is known that these two expressions, *esse* and *bene esse* (or again *plene esse*) are characteristic of two *theological* currents which Anglican comprehensiveness welcomes equally, seeming to give them only a secondary importance not concerned with the *faith* itself: a position which does not correspond with that of the Catholic Church. Assuming that the Anglican members of the commission have fully agreed on the interpretation of the passage quoted, it remains to be seen whether it will be accepted in that sense by the Anglican authorities.

### 3. *The balance between the primatial and the 'conciliar' elements in the exercise of authority*

#### a) *Responsibility or power?*

Even a careful reading of the document may give the impression that in talking of the exercise of authority it speaks oftener and more readily of *responsibility* than of *power* (*potestas*). This may well surprise those who do not regard the two notions as identical.

It goes without saying that every exercise of power implies responsibility in him who exercises it. But the converse is not self-evident.

The *moral* notion of responsibility evokes directly that of *duty*: it does not of itself imply any power more than a simple ability to act or a legitimate power of decision—and these do not establish a right to be obeyed.

Nevertheless this idea of power linked to the exercise of authority and serving as its basis is not entirely absent from the document. We read for example:

“Ordained ministers commissioned to discern these insights and give authoritative expression to them are part of the community, sharing its quest for understanding the gospel in obedience to Christ and receptive to the needs and concerns of all” (§ 6).

From this passage it can be deduced that, while the community as a whole, clergy and laity (the *pleroma* of the Church, as our Orthodox brethren like to call it) share *responsibility* in the search for the whole authentic content of the gospel, they do not share power to give authoritative expression to the results of this search because his has been given only to ordained ministers—and this so much so that it can be called essential to the structure of the Church as was recalled earlier. This holds particularly for the bishop, as is borne out by the passage of the document quoted previously. This point is clear enough then on the plane of local primacy. It will be seen that it is less so with the higher levels of the exercise of primacy.

#### *b) Interaction between the primatial and conciliar elements*

The document speaks several times of a necessary interaction between the primatial and conciliar elements in the exercise of authority. The idea of primacy does not come in however except in connection with assuring *koinonia* between local churches, whether regionally or universally. But then the distinction so clearly made between responsibility and power when talking of the *koinonia* which exists *within* a single local church, because of ordination and the mandate which derives from it, no longer appears so clearly.

The bishop of a more important church, to whom the neighbouring bishops entrust a particular care for safeguarding their mutual *koinonia*, certainly takes on thereby a new *responsibility*, but it is hard to see how, since he receives no new ordination, he can receive a new power of discernment coming from Christ and demanding obedience.

There is a difficulty here which the document does not face squarely. Undoubtedly, as it well says, the charism of *episkope* which the bishop receives at his ordination is intended to safeguard *koinonia* not only within his own local church but between it and the other local churches. This may be why the statement does not bother to remind us that this same charism *ipso facto* empowers the primate to carry out his primatial function. But it would have been better to repeat this in so many words; the more so since it is not only of great interest but also raise a serious difficulty when we come to deal with safeguarding the *universal koinonia*.

#### *c) Regional koinonia and universal koinonia*

I have drawn attention above to the predominantly inductive character of the method followed by the Commission in this document. This is especially in evidence when it comes to the historical emergence of a primacy of the bishop of Rome at the service of the *universal koinonia*—taking further the development which had led to the setting up of regional primacies and being modelled on them. The advantage of this line of approach is that it emphasises that the accession of the bishop of Rome to a universal primacy is no more bound up with a new ordination than is the access of any bishop to a regional primacy: there is no need therefore to look for any other *sacramental* basis for the primacy of the bishop of Rome than the charism of *episkope* that he received at his episcopal ordination. The drawback—apart from the risk of blurring the chronological perspective—is that to assimilate the emergence of universal primacy to that of regional primacies is to make it appear, like them, the result of a simple delegation of powers by local churches, a delegation which does not of itself demand a particular mandate from on high. The powers of a regional primate are in fact strictly limited by the terms devised and agreed upon by the bishops of his primacy, himself included. There is in some sense a voluntary limitation of sovereignty, canonically ratified, in the interests of regional *koinonia*. Thus the Catholic Church customarily says that the establishment of a regional primacy belongs to *ecclesiastical law*. It would not be ready to grant that the same is altogether true for the universal primacy: the first Vatican council declares this to be of divine right, since it is to the mandate explicitly given by Christ to Peter that the Church refers the power she recognises in the bishop of Rome, to feed the whole flock and confirm it in the faith.

The Commission has not overlooked this difficulty. In an earlier draft it was content to point it out briefly. In the final text it wisely devotes a special paragraph to setting out those respective confessional standpoints on which so far agreement has not been reached. I shall come back to these later. But since agreement is not complete, it would have been better not to write:

“What we have written here amounts to a consensus on authority in the Church and, in particular, on the basic principles of primacy” (§ 24).

The phrase “consensus on authority” is to say the least awkward here, since it suggests that agreement is acknowledged on *everything* concerning authority in the Church, and this is not born out by what is in the document. But this misunderstanding is aggravated by what follows: “in particular on the basic principles of primacy”, since here again it is not on *all* the basic principles that there is agreement but only on some: on the historical emergence of a form of primatial authority and on the necessity for a certain interaction, in its exercise, of conciliar and primatial elements. Even this is completely true only for regional primacies; for the universal primacy it is only partially true as we shall see, and in fact this is touched on in the document.