

NOTES ON THE DIRECTION OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK
ON CHURCH AND AUTHORITY AND ON THE PORINGLAND
DRAFT OF FEBRUARY 1976

By the Bishop of Ossory

- (1) Those members who assembled at Poringland in February 1976 to prepare a draft for a further stage of the Commission's work have put us all in their debt. They have invited comments, and these notes, though they contain some comments on the Poringland draft, are looking ahead to the meetings in June and August and are mainly concerned with the final form and content of ARCIC's statement on Church and Authority. Such comments as are made are intended to be constructive for we are all concerned that a final statement should be as widely acceptable as possible and should be addressed to the real situation in both Churches and should suggest movement. The theme of the Malta Report is movement to unity by stages.
- (2) As I have some uncertainties about how the statement should take shape - which may be shared by others - I am venturing to put something of these on paper so that they can be assessed by fellow-members. These notes are not meant to be taken as dissenting from most of the work so far drafted but as asking questions about the ultimate form and content of the document, its direction, commendation and reception.
- (3) Perhaps it would clarify the point if the problem (as I see it) were stated. The bearing of this on the shape and content of a final document may then become clearer.
- The subject of Church and Authority raises a problem which has two aspects affecting the form of a future statement ((a) and (b)).
- (4) (a) The Windsor and Canterbury statements dealt with shared areas, being substantial agreement on elements basic to our common faith. Eucharist and ministry belong to the deepest level of the ecclèsial life, experience and organic structure of both Communion. This fact helped to create the form of the agreed statements. The objective was to show that, in these shared areas, there exists a substantial agreement in faith : 'Our intention was to reach a consensus at the level of faith.' Because of this it was possible to assert that

'in what we have said here both Anglican and Roman Catholic will recognise their own faith.'

- (5) In respect of Church and authority the situation differs in practice. Windsor and Canterbury started from where the Churches are - two Churches with episcopal ministry, priesthood and eucharist. In the present case, there may well be a substantial or even a full agreement on the nature of authority and its purpose of maintaining the Church in the truth of the faith 'once for all delivered'. See, for example, the Poringland document (1 - 10). When it comes to the 'exercise and implications' ¹⁾ of authority, particularly in connection with a Roman primacy, we are dealing with something not shared in the faith and in the ecclesial life and structures of the two Communion. There is a difference as between shared areas of faith and areas where in fact a divergence of concept and operation exists in the Churches as they are. None of us is interested in point-scoring or past polemics but rather in pointing a way forward from the situation as it is. The question then is whether this reality should be reflected in the statement, with constructive suggestions about the exercise and implications of authority. The difference as between the situation with regard to Church and Authority and that reflected in the two earlier statements arises also from the second aspect of the problem.
- (6) (b) This stems from the fact that there are and have been two models of authority in the Church. One model, the development of which is described in our draft, depends largely on acceptance of a Roman primacy in defined terms. The other, which needs spelling out because it continues as a 'live option', is the multiple concept of authority. In the Church of the Fathers, the process was by way of the appeal to Scripture, to reason and to consensus. The Lambeth Conference of 1968 noted that 'the inheritance of faith which characterises the Anglican Communion is an authority of a multiple kind'. (Report, p.82). The same position was stated by Lambeth 1948.²⁾ This is the

1) According to the Malta Report (22), our brief is 'to examine the question of authority, its nature, exercise and implications!'

2) 'Authority ... is single in that it is derived from a single Divine source ... It is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of the Saints, and the consensus fidelium ... It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralised authority, having many elements which combine, interact with and check each other.' (Lambeth Conference 1948, Report, pp.84-5.).

nub of the problem as between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. It may well be that the momentum of our draft documents has not yet carried us to consideration of this point but so far we have not explicitly indicated that there is a problem for us in respect of the exercise and implications of authority. A suggestion can be made later (10) about this, but the problem was seen clearly and stated by Georges Tavard in his comment (ARCIC 141) on the St. Katharine's Schema on Church and Authority. (For the sake of convenience the relevant excerpt is attached at the end of these notes).

- (7) From the point of view of the form and content of a statement, the practical problem is, as Georges Tavard points out, that there are two perspectives, Anglican and Roman Catholic, on authority and primacy. To acknowledge this with openness and to propose a way forward, as does the Lutheran/Roman Catholic statement, is important for the ecumenical potential of the statement.

At Oxford, one member expressed the conviction that a basic question to be investigated for the next meeting was whether, in his own phrase, a Roman primacy is or is not 'part of the works'. Certainly, in the mind of the Commission as reflected in the discussion on the last day of the meeting, the two perspectives loomed large. (See the Minutes for 6th Sept. 1975). The fact that two members were asked to examine these perspectives and to prepare memoranda on the attitude of Anglican ecclesiology to a primacy and on the Roman Catholic view of primacy as an object of faith confirms this. Something of this will have to find a place in what has yet to be written. The main anxiety I have about our draft so far is not so much with what we have composed. Rather is it that, in a document in which Anglicans and Roman Catholics are seeking convergence through joint examination of the subject, it somehow fails to come through with clarity that there are problems which affect the presentation and the substance of the document : (a) the different effects resulting from shared areas of faith and from areas not shared or partly shared; (b) the existence of two models of authority; (c) the existence of two perspectives of primacy.

The question was asked at Oxford, does Anglican ecclesiology throw any light here ? A survey of the Anglican view-point,

from the seventeenth century through the Malines Conversations to Lambeth 1968 indicates that Anglicanism sees no necessary equation between a primacy and the maintaining of the Church in the truth and that such a primacy is not de iure divino. Today, interpretation of the meaning of this phrase has ranged from 'divinely constituted' to 'willed by God' and 'providentially guided'. What Anglicans meant and mean by rejecting the term would appear to be that they know no grounds for asserting that such a primacy is an irreversible and essential constituent of authentic ecclesiality. On the other hand, a brief survey shows that they could conceive of a primacy of order or dignity within a strongly collegial setting. Instances may be seen in the writings of Field, Bramhall, Laud, Cosin, Andrewes, Montague and Wake. The latter asserted that, in his own phrase, the chair of Peter is preserved in all Catholic Churches.¹⁾ Field's and Bramhall's emphasis on the collegial context of primacy is well known. The same points were made at Malines and taken note of in the Report of the Lambeth Conference of 1968. Is this the point of entry for the question posed in the last sentence of the excerpt from Fr. Tavad's comments ?

- (8) There are different views as to what should be the direction of the statement. Neither Roman Catholics nor Anglicans can be asked to reject their own history. They could however be 'prophesied to' and invited to make history, by working out a special relationship in communion. In view of the special position of the Anglican Communion as seen by the second Vatican Council, the direction should be towards what Robert Adolfs OSA called 'a formula which would express the minimum requirements for a new form of corporate unity, which I would call collegial communion between the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church.'

Anglicans can be asked whether they can see a role for a renewed primacy in collegiality (cp. Report of Lambeth 1968, pp.137-8). Roman Catholics can be asked if, in the 'hierarchy of truths', they can visualise teaching on papal primacy as being not so near to 'the foundation of the Christian faith' that such a relationship is possible. Bishop Butler raised this point in his paper 'Unity : An Approach by Stages ?'

1) Tavad draws attention to a similar view-point in Gaul in the early Middle Ages (Papal Primacy and the Universal Church (1974), p.210).

which was one of the preparatory documents for the Malta Report.¹⁾

Here, the Malta Report's governing concept of unity by stages, discussed under the heading of partial communion at Windsor I, is extremely relevant to the present stage of the Commission's work. Equally relevant are the limited communicatio in sacris between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches and Pope Paul VI's several allusions to the 'almost perfect communion' between the two Churches in spite of the fact that Church and authority and primacy are at issue on various levels between Rome and Orthodoxy. Even more important is the developing concept of sister-churches²⁾ and here one recalls Bishop Butler's article on 'An Approach to Anglicans' which contemplates the possibility of a necessary interim stage of 'collegial' relationship.³⁾ It is within the context of the restoration of the communion of sister-Churches through a process of unity by stages that the real perspective of Church and authority emerges for the 'serious dialogue'.

1) 'Very difficult obstacles to organic unity between us remain particularly in the field of doctrine (the papal primacy, infallibility, 'modern' Marian dogmas, for instance). On the other hand, it is common ground that 'the obedience of faith' by which man 'entrusts his whole self freely to God' is a personal assent to the revelation of God himself in Christ; and that the reality of this assent may co-exist with a defective apprehension of the material constituents of this revelation. And it could be argued that the doctrinal differences between our two Communion relate less to 'the foundation of the Christian faith' than to elements in the deposit of faith which, while important, are less important than those elements on which we agree (cp. De Revelatione Nr.5, De Ecumenism Nr.11)', Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogue ed. Clark and Davey (1974), pp. 102-3.

2) cp. the articles in Istina (No.1, 1975) on 'Eglises-soeurs. Implications ecclésiologiques du Tomos Agapis' (J.Meyendorff and E. Lanne). See also the passage in his address at the canonisation of the forty martyrs by Pope Paul VI.

3) The Tablet (14th November 1970).

- (9) These matters come under the heading of 'the exercise and implications' of authority, and bear specifically on primacy, as being an exercise of authority with far-reaching implications. Given the large area of full agreement delineated in MR (3), (4) and (7), and given substantial agreement on eucharist and ministry, the question for the authorities of both Churches will be whether a relationship of collegial communion can be established without a perfect consensus on primacy as this has come to be seen by Roman Catholics, particularly since 1870.

The Rahner-Coventry perspective of beginning from the other end may now be the strategy imposed by history on the ecumenical movement. ¹⁾

- (10) To conclude, a couple of comments and suggestions in connection with the text of the Poringland draft are offered for consideration.

I would like to put forward the suggestion that Poringland para.(14) is an appropriate point at which to spell out briefly something about the model of a multiple authority in the Church, because

- (a) para (14), by talking about the continuous process of 'remembrance' and 'reflection' in the Church, through the Spirit, in the light of the apostolic witness in the Scriptures, of creeds, worship, life and teaching, is in fact speaking indirectly about this model of authority, and
- (b) because the existence of this model of authority is implied in paras.(2), (6), (7) and (9).

Why then appear to avoid saying that this is how Anglicans understand the Church to be maintained in the truth? It is after all of the essence of the Anglican ethos and is explicitly described by at least two recent Lambeth Conferences as the mode in which authority is understood by the Churches of the Anglican Communion. This would balance the exposition in

1) Rahner holds that as much theological progress as is likely has now been achieved and that real progress towards unity will require that institutional unification be put first: 'Could we not consider full unity of faith and theology as a consequence of institutional unification, particularly since the latter need not mean institutional uniformity based on dogma as hitherto envisaged by the Code of Canon Law?' His suggestions as to other Churches admitting 'a certain function for the Petrine ministry' and the nature of this function and the collegial relationship of the Churches in respect of such a primacy are to the point. (The Shape of the Church to Come, 1974 ed., pp.104-7).

para.(12) of the other mode by means of which Vatican I and Vatican II see the Church as maintained in the truth. As it stands, para.(14) needs to be related explicitly to this particular aspect of the 'serious dialogue'.

- (11) We all understand the complex problems of dealing with the historical aspect in a short statement such as this. It cannot be omitted yet it cannot be too expanded or too compressed. Those who are specialists in this field will help us with the content and phrasing here, but the opening paragraph of Poringland (12) by reason of being so condensed conveys to more than one reader an impression of smooth development and universal acceptance. Perhaps the phrase 'Already in the early Church' gives a categorical and comprehensive impression. In describing the development and the situation in the early Church, should not account be taken of the unevenness both in time and place of that situation and development, as represented for example in such points as Tavad's: 'The correlation between the image of Peter and those of the Roman Church and of its bishop remains unclear for a long time',¹⁾ and that of J. F. McCue 'that down through the Council of Nicaea, a Roman universal primacy of jurisdiction exists neither as theoretical construction nor as a de facto practice awaiting theoretical interpretation.'²⁾ Similarly, A. C. Piepkorn, writing of the development by the bishops of Rome of the Petrine image and passages, points out that, even in the West, Africa resisted interventions of the Roman bishop into the second quarter of the fifth century while the Christian East rejected the view in practice and tolerated the theory when it is in the interests of the East to do so.³⁾

There is a big leap in (12) from this paragraph to the second dealing with the nineteenth century, and it is a question whether or to what extent those who drew up the statements of Vatican I had in mind the medieval rather than the early bishops of Rome.

1) 'What is the Petrine function ?' (George H. Tavad in Papal Primacy and the Universal Church (1974), p.210.

2) 'The Roman Primacy in the Patristic Era : I. The Beginnings through Nicaea' (James F. McCue, in the same volume, p.72).

3) 'The Roman Primacy in the Patristic Era : II, From Nicaea to Leo the Great' (Arthur Carl Piepkorn, in the same volume, p.97).

(12) Poringland (17) raises similar questions. It could be taken as implying that General Councils did not regard their decisions as valid without the agreement of the Roman bishop. That this was not so seems indicated by, for example, the General Council of Constantinople in 381. In the case of the Monothelite controversy in the seventh century the decision of Honorius I was in the end over-ruled. Again, specialists will comment, but was it the case that while the agreement of the Roman bishop came to be looked on as highly desirable, the same was thought to apply to the agreement of, e.g. the bishops of Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople?

All that is suggested in these notes is that an impression of over-simplification could be conveyed which would be open to criticism.

(13) Finally, at first sight Poringland (18) seems to be saying that the Church may err and that General Councils are preserved from error. If this is what it means, it will present a problem for 1) Anglicans (Article XXI says of General Councils 'they may err...'). Some expanding seems to be needed for clarification.

(14) A passage in an article by Fr. J.M.R. Tillard (One in Christ Vol. VIII, No.3 pages 257/8, 1972), noted after these comments were completed, makes the point stressed in (3) - (5) above:

"Moreover, it is clear that the method used in the question of the Eucharist could not be put into operation here (i.e. in the question of authority and primacy). With the Eucharist the idea was to bring out the essential truths still held in common despite the rupture. Whereas here, from the very fact that there is rupture, there is of necessity opposition at least at the essential level of doctrine and practice." The development of the theme in respect of the relation of degrees of agreement to degrees of communion (pages 258-263) is similar to (8) above.

These notes are circulated in response to the invitation and to give an opportunity for consideration beforehand as the preliminary drafting period seems to be the right stage at which any of us who have suggestions to make about the document should share them with others.

1) See also ARCIC 99/1 'The Status of Ecumenical Councils in Anglican Thought' (The Dean of Christ Church).

EXTRACT FROM FR. GEORGES TAVARD'S COMMENTS ON THE
ST. KATHARINE'S SCHEMA.

" At the present moment, I see the situation as follows:

(a) On the one hand, the Anglican tradition, while accepting fully the notion of episcopal authority, holds that at least two elements must qualify any idea of a universal primacy.

(b) First, the general Anglican principles concerning authority present as the Christian ideal a delicate balance between the Scriptures (as constantly re-interpreted by biblical scholarship, though always in the light of the patristic interpretation) - the tradition (as embodied in the early councils and the consensus of the undivided Church where there is one) - the requirements of the human reason as it reflects on life and revelation and as it tries to understand the Scriptures and the tradition. These are not three independent sources of authority, but three intermeshing threads in the fabric of the one Christian authority, which is that of Christ present and active in his Church through the Holy Spirit. To a great extent, the proper task of authority at all levels is to keep the balance between the three sorts of elements whose convergence constitutes Christian authority. The proper focus for the highest authority is therefore not likely to be sought in a task, function or privilege granted to one bishop or one episcopal see. An authority which is intrinsically multi-sided is more likely to be properly exercised by a multi-sided corporate body, in which all the sides of authority can be spoken for, than by one bishop whose personal bias, competence, learning, judgment can easily escape the checks and balances necessary to a just assessment of the situation that calls for authoritative decision, or than one episcopal see, whose outlook will naturally be coloured by the national culture in which it functions.

(c) Second, facing the Roman Catholic conception of the primacy and its association with the bishop of Rome identified as the successor of Peter, the general Anglican tradition applies its conception of authority to the matter. It points out the absence of a convincing scriptural argument in favour of the transmission to the bishop of Rome of whatever primacy Peter may have exercised in apostolic times; - the inconclusive character of the argument from tradition, since the tradition shows considerable variations, even at the period of the undivided Church, on the origin, the nature and the extent of a Roman primacy, - and the circular

character of at least some of the argumentation for the Roman primacy, in which the earlier history of the Church and specifically of the papacy is explained by the later developments, and the later developments are read back into the less explicit earlier history.

(d) On the other hand, the Roman Catholic tradition, as formulated at Vatican I and II, asserts that the bishop of Rome has, by the will of God, been given a unique function within and over the episcopal college; that although it has taken different forms in keeping with the needs and necessities of successive times, such a function includes an immediate and universal jurisdiction over all the faithful (yet one which respects the authority of bishops in their diocese), and the possibility of making, in circumstances carefully delineated at Vatican I, irreformable decisions concerning faith and morals. It is fair to add, however, that if one considers, not only Vatican I and II, but the full range of Roman Catholic theology on the point, the acceptance of the Roman primacy is not tied to any specific interpretation of biblical passages, that it is compatible with diverse readings of the historical origins and development of the Roman primacy, that it has been able to co-exist with various systems of church-government and with different degrees of centralisation, that there are considerable varieties of understanding of such notions as jurisdiction, jus divinum, institution by Christ, and that the recovery of the notion and practice of episcopal collegiality is bound to influence the future developments of the theory and practice of the primacy.

(e) At face value, we confront the dilemma of having to square a tradition which accepts the Roman primacy, and a tradition which does not accept it as it is taught and practised by the first. On second look, however, the opposition is not so sharp as that, since a fairly wide range of interpretations of the Roman primacy are at home within Roman Catholicism itself. Our problem would therefore seem to be: Between total rejection of the primacy and uncritical acceptance of the most ultra-montane claims, can one delimit a zone where the two traditions would coincide? Can there be a theory and a practice of the primacy which does justice to the Anglican criteria of doctrinal authority and also to the certainties and uncertainties of scriptural interpretation, of historical development and of reasonable logic? "

(Fr. Georges Tavard A.A.)