

Papal Primacy: An Anglican's Thoughts on the possibility of
its acceptance by the Anglican Communion

by the

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Two factors have contributed to the creation of a climate in which, the writer believes, a great number of Anglicans would readily accept the primacy of the Pope, given agreement on doctrinal statements such as those now coming from ARCIC. One factor is the decline during the present century of the Anglo-Saxons' inveterate suspicion of the Roman Catholic Church, which during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century often expressed itself in irrational outbursts, even rioting, fostered and encouraged by groups such as the Protestant Truth Society ("Kensitites"), and individuals such as the author of what purports to be the revelations of Maria Monk, a former nun. The writer experienced brushes with some of these people in the 1930s and 1940s in English parishes where the use of vestments and incense and the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament called forth cries of "No Popery" and led to disrupted services and rocks through stained glass windows. All this has greatly diminished. It has not, however, disappeared. The Kensitites are defunct, but they have successors. The author of "Maria Monk" is dead, but Ian Paisley is alive.

But fear of the Church of Rome was not confined to these rabid campaigners. It was shared by many quiet, godly English churchgoers who were no lovers of John Kensit and his like and never inclined to take part in riotous demonstrations. To probe the reasons for this in depth would take us into the areas of political and ecclesiastical history, and lead us back centuries prior to the Reformation. But basically the reason is, perhaps, psychological. Roman Catholicism seemed so un-English. And it is a general characteristic of the English to be puzzled by, and often to resent, the un-English. Moreover the Englishman, like his American cousin, very much wants to be accepted and admired by the rest of the world. If that acceptance is not forthcoming (and Apostolicae Curae and what led up to it had made clear that to Roman Catholics members of the Anglican Communion were not ecclesiastically acceptable) the Englishman's patience is apt to be short. "What the heck! We can go it alone" is a toned down example of his characteristic utterance in such circumstances.

What has brought about the great change in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations is without doubt the personality of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. Both from the man and from the Council Anglicans and other separated churches sensed the flowing of a spirit of reconciliation and discerned the will to accept. That statement needs no documentation within this group.

The second factor I have in mind is the development of a concept of primacy in the Anglican Communion over the past two hundred years. After the English Reformation the Archbishop of Canterbury retained the title of Primate of All England (Pope Innocent VI (1352-62), ending the rivalry between Canterbury and York, decided that the Archbishop of Canterbury was Primate of All England and that York must be content with the title Primate of England). As British imperialism, beginning in the late seventeenth century, spread, Anglicanism was brought to many parts of the world first by military chaplains and chaplains attached to mercantile enterprises. The conquered, or otherwise acquired territories were regarded politically as extensions or colonies of Britain, and ecclesiastically as extensions of the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury, although Primate, had no authority under the terms of the establishment of the Church

to create new sees. This required an Act of Parliament. While the Church of England was not slow to send chaplains and missionaries to these "far-flung posts of Empire", decades passed before sees were created and bishops appointed, whether because of the dilatoriness of Parliament or the unconcern of archbishops and kings. The Episcopal Church in the United States acquired its first bishop, Seabury, by consecration by bishops of the Episcopal Church in Scotland in 1784. Three years later Inglis was consecrated in England as Bishop for Nova Scotia. T.F. Middleton became the first Anglican bishop in India (Calcutta) in 1814. Then began the long process of consolidation of Anglicanism in these countries, and formation into provinces, later into national churches in the larger countries. These provinces and national churches have now all become free of state control and are self governing. Only a handful of isolated dioceses (e.g. Falkland Islands, Bermuda) remain under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

All these provinces and churches are united in communion with the see of Canterbury, in holding the faith revealed in the Scriptures and defined by the undivided primitive Church in undisputed Ecumenical Councils, and in loyalty to the doctrinal and liturgical standards of the Book of Common Prayer, even though this Book has been revised by many of them. Each province or church elects its own Primate, but this term is not always used. Metropolitan, Primus, Presiding Bishop and simply Archbishop are alternatives. The method of election varies. Sometimes it is by the House of Bishops, sometimes by an electoral college. In Canada the Primate is elected by the General Synod from names presented to it (three in the first place, though more may be requested) from the House of Bishops.

The Primate is Chairman of the General Synod and of the House of Bishops. The General Synod is the canon making and policy making body. It is the Primate's responsibility to implement canons and to direct policy. In this he is aided by a personal staff and by boards and committees which are concerned with all aspects of the Church's life and mission. The Primate is, then, subject to canon law as completely as any cleric or layman. Yet by virtue of his position he is regarded as the Church's spokesman vis-a-vis the Government in raising matters of Christian concern, and as having the responsibility of holding Christian values before the nation. The Anglican Church of Canada can claim that its Primates have admirably fulfilled these desiderata. They have won the affectionate regard of our Church, and the visit of a Primate to a diocese or parish is always a significant occasion. I believe that other provinces and national churches of our Communion would make similar claims. Many Anglicans, thus, have come to value primacy and to have a great respect for Primates, though this has been, of course, within the limits of national churches or provinces.

But there is the Archbishop of Canterbury. He is the Primate of All England, but in what sense can he be thought of as Primate of the Anglican Communion? It is with his see that the other churches and provinces declare themselves to be in communion. Moreover since 1867 conferences of bishops of the Anglican Communion have been held at Lambeth at roughly ten yearly intervals. The Archbishop of Canterbury is by common consent the Chairman of the Lambeth Conferences. He is also Chairman of the Consultative Committee which meets between conferences to encourage the implementation of resolutions and to prepare agenda for the next conference. It must be stressed that the Lambeth Conferences themselves are not legislative. The bishops may discuss every conceivable subject concerning the Church and its relation to society. They pass resolutions, but these are not binding on

any part of the Anglican Communion. The national churches may or may not adopt and act upon Lambeth resolutions. It may be added that a national church is extremely unlikely to take any action which directly contravenes a Lambeth resolution.

As Chairman of the Lambeth Conference the Archbishop of Canterbury is far more obviously a primatial figure to the Anglican Communion than he was a hundred years ago. The greater speed and ease of travel since the second world war has enabled successive Archbishops to visit many parts of the world and to become also more visibly a primatial figure. This kind of primacy, like that of the national churches, is not perhaps closely analogous to primacy as understood by Roman Catholics. But it surely has within it some of the ingredients of genuine primacy. One sharp difference, however, between the Papal Primacy and that of the Archbishop of Canterbury is that the latter is not elected, but appointed by the Crown, as are all bishops of the Church of England. This is a surviving vestige of the much stricter State control of the Church which goes back to Henry VIII, though it is a procedure which was followed prior to the Reformation in different places and times. A passing nod is given to the principle of election in that a royal *congé d'élire* is issued to the Dean and Chapter of the cathedral church, naming the candidate whom the monarch wishes to be elected. But any semblance of freedom of choice is nullified by the imposition of the penalties of praemunire on chapters which fail to elect the royal nominee. It sounds an intolerable example of Erastianism. But in recent times it has worked well on the whole, since the Crown is advised by an appointments secretary who explores the field of candidates painstakingly and with considerable wisdom. In the present century there have been very few appointments of English bishops which could be described as disastrous; and during this century it may be claimed with some justification that the Archbishops of Canterbury (Frederick Temple, Davidson, Lang, William Temple, Fisher, Ramsey and Coggan) were each the right man for his time. In no other parts of the Anglican Communion are bishops appointed by the Crown or government. A change of procedure in England would, I should guess, be opposed only by a small, though vociferous, group of diehards.

I have tried to show that in the Anglican Communion the conditions may well exist for the acceptance, at least on the part of very many, of the concept of Papal Primacy on the basis of agreed statements of doctrine. If the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches are to be united, I think there can be no doubt that the see of Rome must be acknowledged as the primatial see on grounds both of antiquity and continuity. Constantinople originated in the fourth century, Canterbury in the seventh. The ancient sees of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and others were trodden under in the march of history. Rome alone has a continuous history from the first to the twentieth centuries.

The question now arises: what should the primacy of the Bishop of Rome signify? I maintain that Anglicans could accept the Papal Primacy very much as it was generally acknowledged, and admitted by General Councils, in the first six centuries, and as it was exercised by those popes whom the history books single out as the most illustrious, and pre-eminently by Pope Gregory I. In explaining this (and perhaps qualifying it to some extent) I make the following four comments.

1. Papal Primacy rests more certainly in my belief on the apostolic foundation of the see than on the claim that the Pope is the successor of Peter. I have no deep objection to the papal use of the title "Vicar of Peter", claimed first, I believe, by Leo I, provided that no more is read into it than what it says: "one who stands in the place of Peter". For while the phrase can be properly used in this sense of any bishop in his own diocese, it is pre-eminently suitable for the bishop of the most ancient see. But if the title is taken to imply that St. Peter was the first Bishop of Rome, I have difficulties of an historical nature. Among the ancient sees Antioch could have put forward the same

claim. And Irenaeus who gives us the earliest extant list of Roman bishops (Adversus Haereses III.iii.2-3) says nothing of St. Peter as the first Bishop of Rome. Irenaeus has now doubt that Rome is "the greatest, the most ancient church", having been founded "by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul", and that it has "leadership and authority" which all faithful Christians must acknowledge. When he says that "the blessed apostles (i.e Peter and Paul), after founding and building up the church, handed over to Linus the office of bishop", there is no implication that Peter or Paul or both thought of themselves as Bishops of Rome. So in Irenaeus' list we read that Clement was bishop "in the third place after the apostles", Sixtus was the sixth "after the apostles", and Eleutherus occupied the see "in the twelfth place from the apostles". Eleutherus was not the thirteenth Bishop of Rome; he was the twelfth who held that office from the commissioning of the apostles who gave episcopacy to Rome. Rome's claim to primacy is more surely based on the foundation of that church by the two great apostles who gave their lives for Christ in that city, than on the doubtful claim that St. Peter was its first bishop. But I repeat that I do not object to the title "Vicar of Peter", and only wonder that St. Paul is left out.

2. The Early Councils Canon 6 of Nicea (325) recognized the bishops of Rome as having jurisdiction over the bishops of central and southern Italy, and accords similar rights to the bishops of Alexandria over Egyptian bishops. Eighteen years later, in the course of the Arian controversy, the western part of the split Council of Sardica (343) passed a canon allowing an aggrieved bishop to appeal to the Bishop of Rome. This canon was later assumed by some (e.g. Pope Zosimus) to be Nicene in origin. In any case, advantage was taken of it, and not only in the west but in the east. The appeal of Flavian of Constantinople in the Eutyches affair is a well known example. It appears entirely appropriate that a Primate should have this appellate jurisdiction. It means that he needs an appeal court, or courts, probably not unlike those now in existence in Rome. This is not strange to Anglicans who in each of their national churches have a system of ecclesiastical courts. Canon 3 of the Second General Council at Constantinople (381) gave the Bishop of Constantinople the next place of honour after the Bishop of Rome on the ground that Constantinople was "the new Rome", i.e. the new imperial city. Pope Damasus objected to the wording of this canon in that it suggested what ecclesiastical primacy was related to the civic importance of a city. That Rome happened to be the first imperial city had little to do with Papal Primacy, which rested on apostolic foundation by the two great apostles. His objection was, I believe, justified. Canon 28 of the Fourth General Council at Chalcedon (451) gave the Bishop of Constantinople jurisdiction over the Church in the civil diocese of Pontus, Asia and Thrace, "rightly judging that the city which was honoured by the imperial presence and the Senate and which enjoyed equal privileges with ancient imperial Rome, should also, like Rome, have greater importance in ecclesiastical matters, as being second to it". Pope Leo I refused to ratify this canon, which had been passed in the absence of his legates, for much the same good reason as Damasus had objected to Canon 3 of Constantinople.

3. The Petrine text (Matthew 16:18) was first invoked as scriptural support for Papal Primacy by Pope Stephen (254-6) in his correspondence with Cyprian of Carthage on the re-baptism question. Pope Damasus (366-84) used it more extensively. In view of alternative ways of interpreting the text, and of the strength of the reply that Cyprian made to Stephen (that the commission first to one apostle indicates the unity of the Church, and that the later commission to all the apostles indicates a corporate episcopacy), Anglicans do not see the Petrine text as a convincing support for Papal Primacy, and would rather ground it in the apostolic foundation of the see of Rome, its antiquity and continuity.

4. Historically, the papal claim to primacy gained credibility and acceptance through the character and achievements of some very able occupants of the see of Rome in the early centuries, outstanding among whom were Leo I and Gregory I. In very troubled times both were deeply concerned for the orthodoxy and welfare of the Church, and were equally concerned for, and actively engaged in ameliorating, the distress of refugees and the poor. Both displayed political wisdom of a high order in dealing with the enemies of the empire. Both were pastors who fostered the spiritual, liturgical and disciplinary life of Christians; and Gregory in addition undertook the role of promoter of missions with an admirable sensitivity to the characteristics and customs of those to whom his missionaries went. The title which he preferred, "Servant of the servants of God" reveals his conception of the meaning of primacy.

Papal Primacy, so understood and so expressed, very many Anglicans could, I believe, happily accept if agreed statements of doctrine such as we have already studied should be officially endorsed. These statements will eventually have to include one on the status of the post-Tridentine dogmatic decrees. Yves Congar, in an article "On the Hierarchia Veritatum" in The Heritage of the Early Church (essays in honour of Georges Florovsky, published in 1973 by the Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies) quotes Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, paragraph 11: "Catholic theologians engaged in ecumenical dialogue.... should remember that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith". Thomas Aquinas, he points out, had explored the concept of a hierarchy of truths, distinguishing between "truths of faith...which are such directly, by their content (directe, per se); (and) those which are such indirectly, through their relation to the former indirecte, in ordine ad alia)". In the modern era Catholic theology, opposing the Protestant insistence on but a few "fundamental articles", has "more and more insisted upon the authority of the Church", and the idea of Magisterium has been emphasized. Attention has been given to the question qua auctoritate? rather than the question quid dicitur? Congar says that the Decree on Ecumenism's recognition of a hierarchy of truths is of great importance and consequence for theological dialogue and for the ecclesiology which underlies the Degree on Ecumenism. It is my hope that it may lead in the end to a resolution of the difficulties which Anglicans have concerning the post-Tridentine dogmas - perhaps by way of drawing a distinction between dogma and permissible theologoumena.

Appended Note on Dr. Jay's Paper

Dr. Eric Jay's paper was originally presented to Canadian ARC on the 2nd June this year. It was forwarded to me in July in response to my request for information concerning National ARCs during 1975-76 in preparation for my Report to ARCIC at Venice. Canadian ARC requested that the paper be forwarded to ARCIC and I have taken it as representing the Canadian contribution to the Venice discussion which Professor Fairweather agreed to be responsible for at Oxford last year.

There are three minor points which I should like to take the opportunity of amplifying.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is styled President of the Lambeth Conference and Anglican Consultative Council rather than Chairman. At present the ACC has a laywoman as its Chairman (Chair Person!)

The penalties of praemunire were in fact repealed from the English statute book in 1967.

Since the July meeting of the English General Synod this year the situation over Crown appointments is also slightly different. Negotiations with the Prime Minister followed the affirmation of the Synod in 1974 that "the decisive voice in the appointment of diocesan bishops should be that of the Church", and subsequent outline proposals have been accepted on both sides. In effect the final choice of diocesan bishops would remain with the Prime Minister, but significantly, his choice will now be exercised within a field which the Church has formed and delineated. At a vacancy in see a small standing committee would be set up by the Church. Its membership would include both the Archbishops and Crown appointments secretaries. The committee would draw up a short list of names (optionally in order of preference). The Prime Minister would retain the right to choose the second name or ask for further names, but he could not go outside the nominations made by the Church. A special committee under the chairmanship of a lay communicant Anglican (appointed by the Prime Minister) would put forward names in respect of a vacancy in the see of Canterbury.

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