

## THE CHAIRMEN'S INTRODUCTION

The Malta Report of the Joint Preparatory Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission (1968) outlined the large measure of agreement in faith which exists between the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion (Para.7). It then went on to note three specific areas of doctrinal disagreement. These were itemised in the Report as matter for joint investigation. Accordingly the 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, 1974) we now add an Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church (Venice, 1976). The Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission thus presents its work to the authorities who appointed it and, with their permission, to the whole Church.

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 important the significance of 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 effectively halt the growing experience of unity which is the pattern of our present relations.

The present Statement has, we believe, made a significant 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. At the same time we have been able to dispel common misunderstandings of this belief without minimising these difficulties.

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

The consensus we have reached, if it is 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 vital part of the Christian heritage. It has much to learn from the Anglican 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 radically transform the witness of Christianity to 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.