

# Agreement

on

# Authority

**The Anglican-Roman Catholic Statement with Commentary**

by

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## INTRODUCTION

The question of authority has lain just beneath the surface in the great majority of theological disputes down the centuries. It was exposed in no uncertain terms at the time of the Reformation. In the ministry of Jesus himself it became a cardinal issue, when the chief priests and elders asked him, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' (Matt. 21.23). Both the exercise and the source of Jesus' authority were under question, and both factors remain crucial in any discussion today. The very word 'authority' has come to have a distasteful flavour to it, which does not help toward rational clarification of a complex subject.

Quite clearly it is not in itself a problem only for the Church. Indeed it is probably the most pressing issue in our contemporary society, so that we should not be surprised to find these secular pressures impinging upon Christian thinking much more profoundly than is commonly recognized. When authority is felt to represent inhuman exploitation, then the popular reaction is toward individual freedom, which may tail off into anarchy and licence. We are now encountering a further reaction in the complaint that there is a breakdown of authority. That is to say, we resent the abuse of power and we treasure our liberties, but we recognize the need for some sort of control or restraint. It is within this confusing social climate that the Churches are wrestling with their own problems of authority.

It should be obvious that there are many different forms of authority and very diverse ways in which it may be exercised. The parental role with a growing family well illustrates the point. Young children given an absolutely free hand become very insecure and unstable, whereas too authoritarian a rule for teenagers may provoke a total rejection of authority. Moreover, the kind of authority that a parent possesses over a little child will be very different from that which should exist when the child has become seventeen. By its very nature it is extremely difficult to define and is fraught with dangers in its exercise. The Church is not immune to similar difficulties. In fact it has more, since there is a special dimension of divine authority which is unique, even if it has analogies in human society outside the Church.

Significantly the Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission on the Theology of Marriage concludes that the ecclesiological position of the two churches is a fundamental problem that ranges far beyond the field of marriage.<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiology is profoundly affected by the question of authority. It is important therefore to take note of the title of this present statement, 'Authority in the Church'. The way in which authority has been understood and expressed in the Roman Catholic Church has posed the most serious obstacle in relations with Anglicans. Reduced to simple terms, insofar as Catholics claim to be *the* Church and regard Anglicans as only *a* church, there is a great gulf fixed in Anglican

<sup>1</sup> Published by the Church Information Office in association with the Catholic Information Office (Info form), 1975, paragraph 64.

eyes. The phrase 'separated brethren' smacks of this. Even when the Second Vatican Council speaks of 'separated Churches', it quickly adds:

'For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.'<sup>1</sup>

Behind such a theological position is a full-blown doctrine of authority, which incorporates the claims of Papal primacy, infallibility and jurisdiction. Nevertheless Vatican II considerably relaxed the traditionally rigorist Roman Catholic position with regard to other churches. It inaugurated a new era of ecumenical discussion, which was inconceivable previously.

This modification of stance by the Catholic church needs to be better understood by Protestant Christians. When you have lived for generations with a system that has expressed itself in very black and white terms, such a change can easily suggest a loss of nerve or even a betrayal of the faith. For many devout Roman Catholics the past decade has been a traumatic period. The boundary marks appear to have been removed. Central authority no longer speaks with quite the same dominant voice. Freedom of thought, the right of 'private judgment' so strenuously contended for by the Reformers of the sixteenth century, has begun to strike the Catholic church with full force. To some it seems like a flood that is in danger of carrying everything before it. As Anglicans we need to be very sympathetic to the tensions and problems this has produced. Such a major adjustment requires considerable time and pastoral sensitivity.

This agreed Statement on Authority stands on a different level from the previous Statements on the Eucharist and Ministry. They were described as 'substantial agreements', in that all that was essential to Christian faith was felt by both sides to have been incorporated in them. That did not mean that every detail had been fully agreed, but that the areas where we were still not of one mind were comparatively peripheral. But this Statement on Authority does not go so far as that. It indicates specific problems that have not yet been resolved (para. 24). The seriousness of each and all of these problems will be variously construed, but it could never be pretended that they are simply peripheral matters. Nevertheless the Commission is strongly convinced that its general approach to this most complex subject has been on the right lines and that its conclusions mark a very significant step in doctrinal convergence.

As with the previous Statements, this agreement carries no more weight than that of its signatories. It is offered to our respective churches for their consideration: it is for them to decide whether it expresses such a unity at the level of faith as to encourage further action towards bringing about a closer sharing between our two communions. Despite the gap in time, it is of the utmost importance that the Statement should be considered in close conjunction with the Commission's earlier agreements. There has

<sup>1</sup> *De Ecumenismo*, para. 3. Vid. *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter M. Abbott (London/Dublin 1966), p.346.

been a steady progression, each subsequent Statement building on that which preceded it. What it all adds up to must now be determined. The point is that it must not be relegated to the realm of academic theological argument. There is a pressing need both theologically and pastorally to follow through what has been begun. Simply to try to maintain the *status quo*, because of fears of the sacrifices that ecumenical action might entail, is the coward's way out. It is not the way of faith. Of course there are grave difficulties still to be faced. Swift action that compromises conscience does no-one any good, but there is a need at the same time for integrity and courage.

Where does the Commission go from here? It has now reported on the three major doctrinal areas suggested by the Joint Preparatory Commission in the Malta Report. We have a bulky sheaf of letters and articles containing reactions to our previous Statements. We welcome a similar response to this one. All this material needs close examination, besides the unresolved problems mentioned in this present Statement. Our general conviction has been that a revision of the Statements themselves would not be the best policy, but rather that we should produce amplifications and additions where they are seen to be required.

Julian W. Charley  
Christmas 1976

**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 (Para. 7). It then went on to note three specific areas of doctrinal disagreement. These were listed in the Report as matters 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 recognized 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 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, 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 realize 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

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## THE STATEMENT

### 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 and 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 *episcopate* 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 distinctly 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 symbolized by the participation of several bishops in his ordination.

9. Ever since the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) the churches have realized 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 *episcopate* 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 realization of the will of Christ: 'Father, keep them in thy 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' (John 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 in 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', (Matt. 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 synodical 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 judgment, 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 PRIMAIAL AUTHORITY

19. In times of crisis or when fundamental matters of faith are in question, the Church can make judgments, 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 those judgments, recognizing 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

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

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>1</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 *episcopate* 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 centralize 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 *episcopate* it has often happened that one has been emphasized at the expense of the other, even to the point of serious imbalance. When churches have been separated from one another, this danger has been increased. The *koinonia* of the churches requires that a proper balance be preserved between the two with the responsible participation of the whole people of God.

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 *episcopate* serving the *koinonia* of the churches needs to be realized at the universal level. The only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such *episcopate* 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.

<sup>1</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.

## 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 (Matt. 16.18, 19; Luke 22.31, 32; John 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>1</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.

<sup>1</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 paragraphs 15 and 19 above.



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 re-assess 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 para. 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 Communions in life, worship and mission.

## COMMENTARY

*Figures in parenthesis, e.g. '(2)', refer to the sections of the Statement printed above on pages 8 to 16.*

It is inescapably clear from the New Testament that the Lordship of Christ is central to the Christian faith. He has been 'patently marked out as the Son of God by the power of that Spirit of holiness which raised him to life again from the dead. He is our Lord, Jesus Christ, from whom we received grace . . .' (Rom. 1.4, 5 NEB). That is why the resurrection figured so prominently in the earliest Christian preaching. It sealed his claims, confirmed God's acceptance of his sacrificial death and declared unmistakably that he was the Lord to whom all authority was given. That is why the Statement begins here (1). There is unlikely to be any serious disagreement at this point. The difficulties begin when we try to define how this authority is mediated to and through the Church.

But this starting-point is also fundamental for our understanding of what authority in a Christian context implies. If Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority for the Christian, then any form of derivative authority should bear the hallmarks of the authority of Jesus Christ. He is the Christian's pattern and model here as in everything else. Yet the authority displayed by Jesus in his earthly ministry runs counter to all that we normally associate with the word. 'I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22.27). Glory and humiliation go hand in hand. That is the intended double meaning in the expression of his 'being lifted up from the earth' (John 12.32), for it is from the Cross that his glory radiates supremely. That is why the worship of heaven is directed toward 'a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain' (Rev. 5.6). His authority and exaltation now come in the wake of suffering and shame. Ultimately even this authority will be returned to the Father, 'that God may be everything to every one' (1 Cor. 15.28).

The authority of Jesus during his public ministry was not an assumed role. It stemmed from the reality of who he was. When he spoke, it was recognized to have the ring of truth and the authority of God. When he healed or performed miracles, it was recognized that this was the finger of God. When he prayed, it was clear that here was a uniquely intimate relationship with God. The quality of his life was such that his question, 'Which of you can convict me of sin?' left his audience speechless—friend and foe came to admit again and again, 'We find no fault in him'. When he appeared again to his disciples after the resurrection, the evidence could no longer be gainsaid. Yet his ministry all along had been one of sacrificial service and humility. Now this should be the pattern for all authority in the Church, but the underlying principle has far too often been forgotten.

The amazing factor in the incarnation was the willingness of Jesus not to cling onto equality with God, but to empty himself. His exaltation came *after* his humiliation. Only then should every knee bow at the name of Jesus (Phil. 2.5-11). We are commanded to have his same mind among ourselves. Our human desires to be prominent and to be dominant over

other people are to be rejected. As with Jesus, authority is not vested in an office *per se*; it must be recognized in the quality of life, grasp of the truth or pastoral gifts of the person concerned. There was a reality about Jesus that stood in striking contrast with most religious profession of his day. That is what Christian authority is all about, and woe betide the church that forgets it.

### 1. CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY (2-3)

How is the Church enabled to continue in submission to the Lordship of Christ? By the gift of the Spirit and the record of the New Testament. The Spirit and the word go hand in hand. By neglect of one or the other the Church quickly gets off course. Without the guidance and sanctifying work of the Spirit, the Church degenerates into cold orthodoxy and legalism. Without the word of God as both incentive and touchstone, enthusiasm may be misdirected and false ideas insinuate themselves. Neglect of both is the road to self-destruction.

It is of fundamental importance that the normative character of the New Testament Scriptures is here recognized (2). This record is both a witness to and interpretation of the life, teaching and redemptive work of Jesus. Here is to be found the inspiration for the Church's life and mission: here is the sounding-board for all its teaching and behaviour. Evangelicals should welcome this emphasis. It is well-known how the study of Scripture has become more and more widely advocated in the Roman Catholic church in recent years. The long period of reaction against the Protestant stress on the Bible has been steadily waning. As the Statement puts it, 'Through these written words the authority of the Word of God [Jesus Christ] is conveyed'.

But at once there is a problem. To many Protestants it will come as nothing very new to find Roman Catholics endorsing this normative function of the New Testament. Unfortunately it has so often been qualified by a view of tradition that largely undermined its real significance. Yet tradition receives no mention here. Why not? Post-Tridentine theology, popularized in catechetical instruction, taught that the gospel of Jesus Christ is brought down to us partly in Holy Scripture and partly in oral tradition. In which case, Scripture by itself must be inadequate, a position which was sharply denied in the Sixth Article of the Church of England; 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.'

Much recent Catholic theology has repudiated this post-Tridentine view of Tradition. It has maintained that this was a gross misreading of what Trent was trying to say about Scripture and Tradition. Be that as it may, result has been a re-emphasis on the Catholic side of the sufficiency of the content of Holy Scripture.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the word 'Tradition' has dropped out of much theological vocabulary because of its unfortunate history, objectionable overtones and difficulty of definition. Much the same has happened with 'Infallibility'. The Commission has tried to express

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the chapter by J. R. Geiselmann in *Christianity Divided* (Sheed and Ward, 1962), pp.35-72.

positively its understanding of authority without recourse to past shibboleths, which tend only to hinder progress in mutual comprehension. The real problem is not so much Tradition as an alternative source of the gospel revelation but the nature of the Teaching Authority of the Church, the *magisterium*.

The gift of the Spirit enabled the early Church to recognise what were the inspired documents that came to form the New Testament canon. Such perception is in itself a further assurance that the Spirit will continue to lead and direct the Church into all truth. Here is one of those situations indicated in the co-chairmen's Preface where the distinction between the ideal and the actual has to be borne in mind. The capacity to assess life and faith is the privilege and responsibility of every disciple, but individuals have their own limitations and idiosyncrasies. That is why 'shared commitment and belief' are so important for the creation of a 'common mind', a process that is sadly hampered by divisions. Historically this has been the ground for the Anglican esteem for Tradition—not as a second source of revelation, but as a safeguard for apostolicity and catholicity.

The Statement begins, therefore, with the responsibility that the Church as a whole and all its members individually carry towards all mankind (3). They are enabled to speak and act with Christ's authority in the world. Only then does the Statement turn to the question of authority within the Church's own fellowship.

### 2. AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH (4-7)

Though all will one day acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, whether willingly or reluctantly, what differentiates the Church from the rest of mankind at the present is that it is a fellowship which consciously seeks to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord (4). All that is necessary for faithfulness to Christ is provided for the Christian, but not in isolation for each individual simply as an individual. We need each other. As John Wesley once put it 'To turn Christianity into a solitary religion is to destroy it.' That is why the Statement emphasizes the importance of *koinonia*.

In this section there is sketched out something of the divine ways in which the Lord makes his authority felt and known amongst his people. It is clearly shown to be very different from the hierarchical pattern which envisages an infallible number one at the head of the Church, with a downward gradation of lesser authorities ending with a totally submissive non-contributing laity at the bottom of the scale. Such an image is a travesty of the truth. So at the outset the Statement speaks of the authority that comes with holiness, that 'inner quality of life' that stands out above the average (4). Such authority has nothing whatever to do with the holding of office. It may be found in the humblest believer, in the poor and uneducated, just as much as in the prominent leader or scholar. Such people can speak with an authority which is unanswerable in terms of argument. You cannot ultimately quarrel with a life that outshines the darkness and drabness of the world at large. Such is the kind of authority with which Mother Theresa of Calcutta speaks.

Then there is the authority which comes with the reception and use of the gifts of the Spirit (5). The apostle Paul is emphatic that such gifts are not for personal glorification but for the edification of the Church (Eph. 4.12). With the Charismatic Movement has come a rediscovery of these aspects of the Church's life. Again it is significant that these gifts are not necessarily associated with the holding of any special office in the Church. They underline the fact that in the *koinonia* we need each other and that everyone has something to contribute. If it is a gift of the Spirit, then its exercise will mediate the authority of the Lord to his Church.

From the New Testament it is plain that the exercise of the charismatic gifts was not felt in itself to be adequate in itself for the building up of the body of Christ. Just as Jesus himself had called and trained the twelve apostles, endowing them with special authority, so the apostles saw the need for a more structured leadership in the early church. What was required was a regular oversight of the fellowship, besides the more spontaneous use of gifts. When the Statement speaks of *episcopus* (5), it is not just referring to bishops as we have come to understand them in subsequent history. There is one basic ordained ministry, that of oversight, which may be exercised in a variety of ways.<sup>1</sup> The Statement jumps from this general idea to the more specific role of the bishop, but in either case it involves 'ministerial functions' and 'pastoral authority'. The keynote throughout is service—serving the servants of Christ to assist them to greater fidelity and commitment in their service. Every community needs some form of leadership and the Church's fellowship is no exception. If the bishop who exercises this pastoral authority is recognized by the community as called by Christ to such a ministry, then he has an authoritative responsibility for the community's spiritual welfare. In these circumstances 'he can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its daily life'. The difficulties arise in deciding how this is best done. It is not only in more obviously disciplinary situations that this authority is needed (though the complete breakdown of internal discipline in most churches is only too apparent). These are times that call for direction and challenge to a more fruitful undertaking of the Church's mission. Even in these cases 'he does not act alone'. It is not a matter of the personal whim of an individual bishop. All who share such responsibilities are called to strive together for the same goals, in harmony and mutual support. It is the ideal, however difficult in practice to realize.

Even so the Statement is very careful to indicate that the perception of God's will is not the sole prerogative of the ordained, let alone of bishops. All may 'become sensitive to the leading of the Spirit' (6). Often it will not be the ordained who are most 'receptive to the needs and concerns of all'. The ordained ministry is called to exercise discernment over the insights and contributions of the members of the fellowship and to 'give authoritative expression to them'; but it does not stand in superior isolation from the fellowship in this process. It is 'part of the community'. Even the ordained ministry's teaching must be assessed and weighed by the community: the laity are not intended in the purpose of God simply to be passive recipients.

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller elaboration of this diversity, see the commission's Agreed Statement on Ministry.

Such is the complexity of 'this continuing process of discernment and response' (6). The authorities in the church are fallible, sinful, human beings with many limitations (7). Can there then be an infallible *magisterium*? There is no absolute guarantee for every occasion that a certain interpretation of scripture is correct, and an alternative one erroneous. We cannot always be certain that we have rightly construed the Spirit's leading. Yet amid this confusion of uncertainty Christ has promised 'never to abandon his people'. In the divine weaving the warp consists in this blending of types of discernment and response, while the woof is the awareness of human inadequacy, which is 'a continual summons to reform'.

### 3. AUTHORITY IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCHES (8-12)

The wider the group, the more complicated becomes the exercise of authority. The Church of Christ is a world-wide phenomenon. How can it be held together in harmonious obedience to its Lord? Inevitably there will be great cultural diversity, differing situations calling for differing responses. But the Church is one and its Lord is one.

This section (8-12) moves on to the ways in which this world-wide communion of churches can be maintained in a true unity and catholicity. 'Local church' is used here as a term to describe the fellowship of churches in the locality under one bishop (8), not the use with which evangelicals are more familiar. This is not to imply that the diocese is the essential unit, or is itself 'the Church of Christ' in any special sense. It is simply moving on from discussion of the ordained ministers in individual churches. All the local churches are required to work together (8). Awareness of the 'universal communion' is necessary for a local community to be 'distinctively Christian': this acts as a stimulus and a check on its own faith and life. The episcopal system, with the participation of several other bishops at the bishop's ordination, symbolizes and seeks to act as this kind of bridge. It is an ideal. It may be achieved by quite different means than the episcopal system of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. In the *Agreed Statement on Ministry* it was *episcopus* that was agreed to be essential, not *episcopoi* (i.e. bishops, as we know them to-day). In our respective churches the episcopal pattern has become the norm for seeking to expose and to achieve this ideal.

The authority of councils must be understood in the light of the principles of discernment and response, check and counter-check, as already described (6, 7). This is what lies behind the statement that 'decisions are authoritative when they express the common faith and mind of the church' (9). They are not therefore 'an imposition', because they clarify and express authoritatively what the Christian community in general has already perceived to be true. The Anglican Article rightly says that 'Councils may err' (Art. XX), but the Church of England has at the same time had a high regard for those Conciliar decisions that were seen to be fully compatible with Scripture. There are times when a problem confronts not just a certain region, which may seek a solution for itself in this manner, but the whole Church. Such was the case with the question of Gentile membership of the Church in its very beginnings, which was resolved at the Council of Jerusalem. Similarly the Council of Nicaea in 325 had to make a clear decision concerning its understanding of the Person of Christ, an issue which was threatening to

tear the Church apart. The binding nature of that Council's authority stems fundamentally from the fact that its conclusions were gradually seen to express 'the common faith and mind of the Church'. But its authority also lay in its being an 'ecumenical council', thus representing the whole Church, insofar as that is ever physically possible. It was not the decision of one separate segment only. East and West have disagreed on the number of early councils that can be called 'ecumenical' in this sense. The concept itself poses great difficulties. How representative must a council be to be termed 'ecumenical' and so in some way binding upon all Christians? It is alleged, for instance, that even at Nicaea the only occasion when all the bishops were present was at a banquet thrown by the Emperor Constantine. Could we ever again witness an 'ecumenical' council in the full sense, when the Church has become so extensive and so widely fragmented?

We are brought back again to the complex way in which the Spirit guides the people of God into the truth. There is not one lone voice to show the way. All the people of God may be led by the Spirit, but not all always want so to be led. Blindness, selfishness and sinfulness impede the process, yet the Lord will not abandon his Church. It is in this context that councils are used as a means of discerning the truth and fostering the life and mission of the Church.

The principle of oversight does not stop with 'local churches' or dioceses. This is a need for an oversight of the overseers. Historically, this evolved with the recognition of the prominence of certain sees (10). Centres like Alexandria, Antioch and Rome were looked to for a lead, and so their bishops came to be assigned this wider responsibility. Again, it is not an assumed superiority, but is intended to be a pastoral service. It is to be 'carried out in co-responsibility with all the bishops of the region'. The last sentence of the paragraph is open to misunderstanding. It is not a Cyprianic echo of the Church being in the bishop: 'the Church of God is found in each of *them*' refers to 'the other churches', not to the bishops. How the bishop of a prominent see is to fulfil this task is further elaborated in paragraph 11.

Amongst these prominent sees Rome came to have prominence (12). This was associated with the belief that Peter and Paul had died there. In an age that esteemed martyrdom so very highly, the death of two apostles was regarded as profoundly significant. To many of us today such martyrdoms have no bearing whatever upon the importance to be attached to a see. What we must recognize is that this is what happened in history. The further analogy drawn between the bishop of Rome and the apostle Peter could be construed in different ways. In some respects the analogy was an apposite one, when we consider the kind of leadership that Peter exercised in the apostolic age. Moreover, he was not immune from very grave mistakes, so much so that he had to be publicly reproved by the apostle Paul (Gal. 2.11ff.). It is quite a different matter where the bishop of Rome's preeminence is interpreted as being more than a providential development in history, but rather as a revealed truth, such as to become an article of faith. For on that interpretation to stand separate from the bishop of Rome would be to be guilty of disobedience to the commands of God. But such a claim for the pope seems to be unfounded in scripture and cannot therefore be easily conceded.

The idea of a primacy is already accepted in the Anglican communion, but it is, as one might say, pitched at considerably lower key than that of the Pope. In fact, the Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of the First Vatican Council 'gave *the service of unity* as the essential *ratio* of the place accorded to the successor of Peter in the see of Rome'.<sup>1</sup> His task is to foster unity in fidelity to the gospel, without 'overriding the authority of the bishops in their own dioceses'. At the time of the Kulturkampf in Germany, Pius IX confirmed the stand taken by the bishops with the statement that 'the Pope is the Bishop of Rome but is not the bishop of any other place or diocese'. It was unfortunate that the First Vatican Council was abruptly terminated before it had completed its work, leaving the impression of a Papal supremacy that would get its way by domination rather than with the full co-operation of all the bishops. It had to wait till the Second Vatican Council for this balance to be struck, but by then a great deal of damage had been done. That submission to the Pope's authority would not 'stifle the distinctive features of the local churches' reads a little fanciful to the historian, because precisely the reverse seems so often to have been the case in liturgical matters, theological research or within the religious orders. The end of paragraph 12 gives due acknowledgment to the ways in which the ideal of Papal primacy has frequently been obscured, if not contradicted. So much complex theology has been produced surrounding the primacy that it is hard for the enquirer even to discern the ideal, let alone to trace out any authentic implementation of it. Failures and abuses make us very diffident whether it could ever be adequately reformed to provide the kind of primacy that would be acceptable to Anglicans. It should be added that the very scale of the world Church today makes one wonder whether one man can possibly shoulder such responsibility, even given numerous safeguards and boundless support.

#### 4. AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF FAITH (13-18)

One of the difficulties involved in theological statements is that of presenting a full and balanced picture. This next section (13-18) must be read very carefully as a whole. Individual sentences lifted out of the total context will give a very distorted picture. As with most aspects of authority nearly every comment immediately requires some form of qualification. The universal communion is 'founded on faith in Jesus Christ' (13). How can this 'common faith' be more fully understood and more clearly expressed by every local church? What is required is more than simply 'intellectual assent', since what we believe profoundly affects the way we live. Christian faith is a 'response of the whole person' (14). It is a response, not to some philosophical idea of Christ, but to the Son of God, incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended and alive for evermore (13). Thus our faith is rooted in historical fact, which in turn requires theological interpretation. That is why the summaries of creeds and statements of belief have proved so necessary. As early as the New Testament itself such formulations were being employed. They are not in themselves the revelation of the gospel, nor are they an addition to it, but are intended to be meaningful and relevant interpretations. They are 'always instrumental to the truth which they are intended to convey' (14).

<sup>1</sup> J. M. R. Tillard in 'The Horizon of the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome' in *One in Christ*, (1976—1).

To imagine that the Church in the twentieth century should, or ever could, resemble exactly that of the apostolic age is to pursue a false tack. Even at the beginning it exhibited much diversity; for the Church is a growing organism that must be responsive to the needs and situation in which it finds itself. Yet there is much that must not change, because the final revelation of Jesus Christ is God's last word to man. Paragraph 15 elaborates this balance of 'remembrance' of the past and 'translation' for the present. Without this remembrance the Church's desire to be relevant and contemporary may easily cause it to slip anchor from the firm hold of the gospel. 'Simply to repeat the original apostolic words' is not enough. 'The Church's life and work' are to be shaped by both these things. Unfortunately the Church has far too often proved to be malleable when it should be inflexible and rigid where it ought to be adaptable. When certain formulas have been recognized to transcend their original setting, they may become part of the Church's 'permanent teaching' or tradition, but even 'this does not exclude subsequent restatement'.

Arriving at an agreed canon of Scripture was a gradual process, but it implies the possibility of explicit guidance by the Spirit (16). There is evidence to show that approximately the New Testament canon as we know it was accepted in the East and West well before the end of the second century. Doubts remained over the inclusion or exclusion of certain books much longer. Martin Luther could still be querying the canonical status of the epistle of James in the sixteenth century. Conciliar decisions on the subject did not imply a superiority of council over Scripture, but rather that the church already had and must continue to submit itself to the normative authority of the New Testament record. With all conciliar decisions 'the process of reception' is affected both by their subject-matter and by the response of the faithful. Again it is gradual and involves a combination of factors.

Paragraph 17 is descriptive of the role played by the see of Rome in history. It should read in conjunction with the conclusion of paragraph 12.<sup>1</sup>

Conflict and debate are inevitable (18). We can never be sure where we are most likely to find the clearest grasp and most faithful response to the gospel. It may not necessarily be among the leaders or scholars of the Church. This is where some court of appeal is vital—and it is to Scripture and its past interpretation in history that both our churches look. Divisions have come as much through divergent interpretations of Scripture as from its rejection. What one may regard as a legitimate deduction, another may see as an unwarranted superimposing upon the text of Scripture. Bishops have a special responsibility to ensure that there is a proper resort to the norm in times of conflict, not only as a negative safeguard but also positively to promote the truth. Like anyone else, bishops will not 'invariably be free from errors of judgment'. To describe the Church as 'indefectible' is to affirm our belief that, despite all human failures, the Lord will not desert his Church.

<sup>1</sup> See p.22 above.

## 5. CONCILIAR AND PRIMATIAL AUTHORITY (19-23)

An understanding of the role and value of primacy for both our churches has been already set out (10-12). The Statement has also described something of the functions and authority of councils. This section seeks to show how both are needed and may be used by the Spirit to guide the Church, maintaining it under the Lordship of Christ. Even in churches whose system of government is non-episcopal and ostensibly very different, both elements are frequently found, though in a modified form. It has been the conviction of our two churches that our respective patterns in board outline have been God-given providentially and have proved their worth, despite all their abuses and failings. Both churches accept the need for and desirability of both conciliarity and primacy. The differences have lain in the authority accorded to each, the ideals sought and the safeguards attached. It is the Commission's hope that what has been expressed in this Statement goes a considerable way in resolving many of those difficulties. For evangelicals the conciliar qualifications to the papal primacy established by the Second Vatican Council have been a most important development. We still await their full implementation. The idea of paragraph 21 has not yet been convincingly demonstrated to those who are not Roman Catholics.

If historically, and still today, the see of Rome alone makes any claim to universal primacy, then it would seem to be the appropriate see for such a function in any future union (23). For Anglicans this could hardly be on dogmatic grounds, but rather because it was manifestly appropriate. Nor could such a primacy be acceptable until it publicly sheds those attachments of the past that have made it totally unacceptable to Protestants. As Anglicans we accept the principle of primacy and its desirability, but on doctrinal grounds and from practical realism we envisage something very different from the kind of hierarchical pinnacle that the Papacy has seemed to be. The Commission has presented in their Statement the kind of ideal that we believe to be mutually acceptable to our two churches. Even having said that, we are very conscious of major problems still to be resolved, with which the next section deals.

## 6. PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS (24-25)

The first difficulty mentioned here is that of the weight given to the Petrine texts in support of claims on behalf of the Roman see. From early times controversy has raged round their interpretation. However, with a widespread modification in exegetical claims by Roman Catholic scholars, this should hardly present too serious an obstacle in the future. Only if the extreme interpretations of the past are maintained as essential to Catholic faith will a similarly staunch opposition be aroused on the Protestant side.

The question of 'divine right', or the use of language implying such an idea, is a much graver matter. There is a world of difference between regarding the primacy of the Roman see as 'part of God's design' providentially, and holding it to be a *sine qua non* of ecclesiality and catholicity. Some abatement of the 'divine right' claim is a precondition for the restoration of communion.

## AGREEMENT ON AUTHORITY

With regard to infallibility we should note that Catholic claims are for the infallibility of the Pope's teaching, not for the pope himself. Protestants are not generally aware of how extensive were the rigorous conditions laid down by the First Vatican Council for hedging round the doctrine of infallibility. So much was this the case that it led to the comment at the time that the only time you could be sure that the Pope was infallible was when he said nothing. But the Statement rightly draws attention to the problems associated with the Marian dogmas. If such dogmas can be 'infallibly' pronounced, then how effective are the safeguards? They may reduce to a minimum the number of occasions when it can be claimed that the pope has spoken infallibly, but it is very difficult to maintain that these particular Marian dogmas 'express the mind of the Church on issues concerning the divine revelation.' If they do actually express the mind of the Church at that particular point in time, so much the worse for the Church. The appeal to Scripture ought to put paid to such ideas very promptly. It is not enough for Catholics to argue that these are very peripheral, devotional matters: the principle underlying the possibility of promulgating such dogmas makes the whole subject highly suspect.

Jurisdiction is another very thorny topic. It is the lack of a clear delineation of the limits of the claim to papal universal jurisdiction that is alarming to Anglicans. We can only request the Roman Catholic church to clarify their own position to the point where we could be fully reassured.

The gravity of these outstanding problems will be 'variously judged' (24), but no one could pretend that they were trivial or peripheral. Nevertheless, the Commission believes that this Statement marks a significant advance in our mutual understanding of the problems of authority (25). Theological convergence is always encouraging, often surprising. The avoidance of emotive vocabulary has been deliberate, where it has impeded an honest appraisal of the real issues to be resolved. The omission, therefore, of terms which might have been expected is not part of an endeavour to sweep the difficulties under the mat. The Commission has genuinely sought to get behind the entrenched positions of the past. We are hopeful that the approach taken and the progress made augur well for the resolution of the difficulties that remain.

## CONCLUSION (26)

Three Agreed Statements on Eucharist, Ministry and Authority together constitute a sizeable area of agreement. The aim of the Commission has not been just an intellectual exercise, nor do we imagine that doctrinal agreement is the sole way to Christian unity (26). Since the Malta Report envisaged 'unity by stages', it is the Commission's hope that our respective authorities will carefully consider whether any practical step forward could and should now be taken to bring our two churches closer together. We believe that the measure of doctrinal agreement achieved merits such serious consideration.

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