

A final remark is this: perhaps it is exorbitant to expect a statement which already marks so admirable an advance to do more than it has, but I would have liked clearer guidance on the relation of the ordained ministry to the Church as a whole. In particular I would like to see the question discussed, is the ordained ministry responsible to the Church as a whole, or is it responsible only to God in Christ, without the intervention of the rest of the Church? But, as most Anglicans have never even considered this question, I do not think I have any right to complain that it has not yet come up.

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### The Agreed Statement on Authority: A Catholic Comment

It is with bewildered amazement that one welcomes this statement. Who could have anticipated that in less than seven years this small group of Anglicans and Roman Catholics could have made such progress towards an adequate agreement on the crucial question of authority in the Church? The smooth prose of the statement conceals the difficult work of establishing mutual understanding. In memoranda posted round the world and in intense discussions in annual meetings the participants have been forced to analyse what they really think; they have learned from one another and have sifted out an agreed formulation of a common mind.

Before assessing its success one must be clear about its purpose. It is designed to show to what extent there is agreement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics on those matters of faith where agreement is essential for full unity. It is misleading to speak of a political statement, but it is a doctrinal statement with an eye on the minimum agreement needed for full unity. It cannot be an exhaustive statement of belief and it has to be deliberately non-committal on anything in which, at present, a variety of views is compatible with the basic unity of faith. Inevitably it has to revolve round matters which have been of concern in the past and on which it has been necessary for Churches to make a stand. The theology in which it is couched is always open to criticism and improvement, but the main issue is whether, whatever theology is used, it can be established that the two communities are in basic agreement. A statement that is a basis for unity is not a statement that all the members of the

respective Churches all individually believe what is stated, rather it is a statement of what they ought to believe as professing members of the Church and it is a statement of the public faith by which the Church lives and acts. And, especially in the case of doctrine on authority, it is a statement of principles and ideals against which behaviour is to be judged and it is not a guarantee that the ideal will always be realized (at least for the future).

A Roman Catholic can begin by asking how far the statement incorporates beliefs concerning authority which are the present basis for unity in the Roman Catholic Church. This is not entirely inappropriate and it may even be necessary lest the statement be misjudged as a quite inadequate expression of Roman Catholic convictions. When a baptized adult from another Church is received into full communion and when a priest is to be licensed to preach or to take responsibility for a parish each is expected to make a profession of faith. The present form of this consists of the Nicene Creed to which is added the acceptance of all that the Church teaches, and according to the way in which it teaches, concerning faith and morals whether the doctrines have been solemnly defined or have been declared and proclaimed by ordinary teaching authority; special reference is made to teachings on the sacraments, the sacrifice of the Mass, the mystery of the Church and the primacy of the pope. This directs one's attention particularly to the two Vatican councils where there is formal teaching on the doctrine of authority. The Second Vatican Council did not make any doctrinal definitions but its teaching may be judged to have definitive authority at certain points because it formulates what is 'ordinary' teaching.

The First Vatican Council did issue some doctrinal definitions. It affirms that Peter was constituted by Christ as head of the visible Church with a primacy not merely of honour but of jurisdiction. Primacy of jurisdiction is not a category that the statement uses and it remains one of the unresolved problems (n. 24d). Apart from mentioning twice that Peter died in Rome the statement does not say very much about him. We are told (n. 24a) that Roman Catholic scholars are not all agreed on the interpretation of the Petrine passages and that certain interpretations provide a difficulty for Anglicans. It is noted (n. 12) that the importance of the bishop of Rome among his brother bishops has been explained by analogy with the position of Peter among the apostles. It is not clear whether all agree that this is a correct way of explaining it. I would have thought that it would not be difficult to agree that it is the teaching of the New Testament that Christ did give a position of pre-eminence to Peter though there might well be plenty of (legitimate) differences of

opinion on how and when this was done. There might well be difficulties in assessing how far New Testament teaching can be transposed into the category of primacy of jurisdiction. It seems to me that the commission ought to refer more explicitly to the place of Peter and to the exegesis of the Petrine passages. (It is surely unfortunate that in n. 24a the commission seems to imply that for future union it will be necessary to ban certain older forms of exegesis of these passages.) Perhaps the commission itself need not undertake this study. It can, for instance, refer to the excellent work already carried out by the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in the USA.

The first Vatican Council defined that it is by Christ's institution i.e. *iure divino* that there are successors to Peter in the primacy over the universal Church; it also teaches that the bishop of Rome is that successor. The council did not wish to settle why and with what permanence the primacy had to be located in Rome and it was content to assert the fact while leaving room for a variety of views. It could be by divine decree, by decision of an apostle, or by historical circumstances that the primacy came to be in Rome and, accordingly, it might be judged permanent or changeable. The statement merely describes the historical process by which the primacy was associated with Rome and it observes that there is no other claimant. But on what basis is a universal primacy needed? The council affirmed that it is needed 'by Christ's institution i.e. *iure divino*'. But these two phrases are not as precise as they may seem. The statement itself notes that there is no clear interpretation of the phrase (n. 24b). The terms can indicate an explicit command of Christ (before or after the resurrection), or a disposition decided by an apostle (or by the Church in the apostolic age) which is permanent in the Church, or a later development which is recognized as being not only God's will but also of permanent value for the Church. What is common to these is the conviction that it is God's will and permanently so. Does the statement affirm the same teaching as the council? It asserts that the development of the papacy was understood to be in accordance with Christ's will. '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' (n. 12). And in an agreed affirmation about primacy it also says: '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 primate and conciliar aspects of *episcopo* serving the *koinonia* 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 *episcopo* is

the see of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died' (n. 23). One can add to this that there runs through the statement the conviction that the history of the Church is under the guidance of the Spirit and that certain developments can be recognized as being of permanent value to the Church. It seems to me that enough is said to measure up to the minimum required by the *iure divino* of the First Vatican Council. Perhaps a statement about the primacy of Peter would help to remove any ambiguity.

The First Vatican Council taught that the primate has a primacy of jurisdiction that is episcopal, ordinary, universal and immediate. The statement does not use the expression primacy of jurisdiction and it points out that the Roman Catholic Church today is seeking to replace the juridical outlook of the nineteenth century with a more pastoral understanding of the authority of the Church (n. 24d). It is not necessary to use the category of 'jurisdiction', especially if one can describe the reality better in other terms. The statement notes that Anglicans have difficulty because the limits of universal, immediate jurisdiction are not clearly specified. This is, of course, a difficulty of which Catholics also have experience (both during and after the First Vatican Council). But the statement does give a description of the primacy which, in different categories, expresses what the council was trying to formulate and it also describes the limits to such primacy. There is explicit agreement that the authority is episcopal. The statement describes the task as that of promoting Christian fellowship in faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles and guarding and promoting the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and one another (n. 12). Like a regional primate he has the 'duty to assist the bishops to promote in their churches right teaching, holiness of life, brotherly unity and the Church's mission to the world. When he perceives a serious deficiency in the life and mission of one of the churches he is bound, if necessary, to call the local bishop's attention to it and to offer assistance' (n. 11). And, again, like the regional primate 'his interventions in the affairs of a local church should not be made in such a way as to usurp the responsibility of its bishop' (n. 21). Nor should he 'seek uniformity where diversity is legitimate or centralize administration to the detriment of local churches' (n. 21). And according to the statement a bishop 'can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its (the community's) daily life' (n. 5). With regard to teaching that statement says of a regional primate: '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 the initiative in speaking for the Church' (n. 20). It seems to me that the statement includes all that a Roman Catholic might look for as the basic minimum description of the place of the pope. Of course the mode and style of the exercise of primacy is another question. The First Vatican Council treated the papacy in isolation and needed to be complemented by the teaching of the second council on bishops and their collegiality. The statement begins from conciliarity among the bishops before describing primacy both regional and universal. And it insists frequently on the place of the community and of shared responsibilities in the exercise of authority.

x In the statement there is no agreement on the infallibility of the pope (n. 24c). However, that is only one of the ways in which, in Catholic thinking, there may be infallible teaching in the Church. What is fundamental is that the Church can teach with confidence under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and confidence may be attached not only to certain forms of papal teaching but also to councils, to the ordinary teaching of bishops and to the ordinary beliefs of the Church as a whole. The statement expresses clearly the infallibility of the Church in council (though the difficult word itself is not used) for it is recognized that the Church in council may make decisions on fundamental matters of faith which 'exclude what is erroneous' (n. 19). And there is a very careful explanation of the status and value of doctrinal formulas (n. 15). So, although there is no agreement on papal infallibility (nor on infallibility in ordinary episcopal teaching and in the universal belief of the Church) there is agreement on the fundamental principles from which all this has been derived.

x The authority of councils is accepted in both Churches. 'This authority is ascribed in both our traditions to decisions of the ecumenical councils of the first centuries' (n. 19). A footnote adds: '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'. This implies that Roman Catholics have a much longer list of ecumenical councils and that is in fact the case. But it could be pointed out that there is no definitively agreed list of such councils nor is there always general agreement on the weight to be given to each part of their decrees. There is need for considerable discussion between Anglicans and Roman Catholics on how each does in fact view past councils. It is likely that a considerable variety of views is compatible with the basic agreement in faith that is needed for full unity.

x The First Vatican Council issued some doctrinal definitions and so it

has been necessary to compare the wording of its teaching carefully with what is said in the statement. The Second Vatican Council did not make any definitions so it may suffice to speak of its teaching in more global terms. The Decree on Revelation spoke of the authority of scripture in the Church in some detail but the statement gives a remarkable and succinct account of essentials. The council provided a lengthy description of the Church, especially as the people of God. It is the kind of theology which Anglicans find congenial. In the council, and in the statement, there is a conviction that the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit are present in the Church community in a special way and are guiding it in such a way that it will not fail, in spite of sin, to remain the instrument of salvation in the world. The council had much to say on the role of bishops and of the collegial relationships of bishops with one another and with the pope. It seems to me that in the statement on ministry and the statement on authority there is an adequate description both of collegiality and of the role of the individual bishop and it is not necessary to illustrate this with lengthy quotations. One could note that the statement is more forthright in saying that those in authority are 'subject to the limitations and sinfulness of human nature' (n. 7) and that 'sometimes the conduct of the occupant of this see (of Rome) has been unworthy of his office' (n. 12).

So far an attempt has been made to show that, with certain exceptions, the statement does include what, in an ordinary Roman Catholic view, are basic essentials. Yet it would be misleading to leave the impression that it does in fact represent an ordinary Roman Catholic view. In many ways the structure and approach of the statement are familiar and congenial to Roman Catholics and especially the stress on the presence of the Spirit guiding the development of the Church. But the theology of authority comes inductively from that history rather than being deduced from the developments (especially the papacy) after they have taken place. The more historical approach to theology has had a considerable influence on the Second Vatican Council and on life and theology since, but it is still not as widely appreciated as it might be. The council drew attention to the importance of the local church and to the value of local traditions. But the statement takes the process much further by building up a theology of authority from the local church. The council stressed collegiality but over and over again the primacy of the pope is put first and although there was an intention of being pastoral it is juridical categories that predominate in the discussion of authority. In the statement these categories are mostly absent and primacy is based on conciliarity. The statement, therefore,

X requires of Catholics that they take to heart much more deeply and implement more speedily the directives of Vatican II.

Since the statement contains only general principles it is rather remote from the give and take of the exercise of leadership and from the shrewd cautions or misjudged initiatives of real Church life. The statement stresses that primatial authority must not usurp the position of lesser authorities, but at the same time the primate must promote right teaching and call attention to serious deficiencies. It follows that every act by a primate is controversial. It is always possible for someone to say that the primate has acted too soon or in the wrong way either because the local people could handle it themselves or because the primate is trying to impose uniformity where variety should be permitted. Recent events given an example. The Pope has written to the Archbishop of Canterbury to point out that the ordination of women is a departure from tradition that makes the unity of the Church more difficult to achieve. Many, including some Anglicans, agree with him and applaud the exercise of 'oversight' in making this point publicly. But others (including the Anglican primate and some Catholics) consider that this is a matter where legitimate variety ought not to be made into an obstacle to unity. Accepting primacy means preparing oneself for controversial decisions.

The statement concentrates, inevitably, on bishops. But the amount of print devoted to them is not representative of the influence they have in real life in either communion. To that extent the statement could be misleading and it is necessary to give full weight to the brief sentences that refer to the primacy of the authority of Christ, to the sharing in 'authority' by all believers and to the strong influence of holiness and wisdom wherever they are found.

The statement includes one item which is novel for most Roman Catholics. The concept of a regional primate is based on the ancient model of patriarchs and clearly has in mind the role of the archbishop of Canterbury. The Roman Catholic Church today has patriarchs in the eastern rites and a patriarch of the West who is also pope so that the two offices become confused. Then there are archbishops whose responsibilities, such as they are, cover only a small number of dioceses. Authority at regional level is now exercised by episcopal conferences of which the president acts as general spokesman and in which other individual bishops are given overall responsibility for various areas (such as liturgy or ecumenism). In England, for example, the archbishop of Westminster has episcopal authority only in his own diocese and archiepiscopal authority in four other dioceses. If he also happens to be the president of the episcopal

conference of England and Wales, he is the chairman and spokesman who is pulled backwards or pushed forwards by a majority of his colleagues. If he is also a cardinal, this dignity gives him more influence in curial administration in Rome and more direct access to the pope. But the news media have begun to describe the archbishop of Westminster as the 'leader' of Roman Catholics 'in this country'. Sometimes, because he lives in London, this is taken to mean a leadership in the United Kingdom as though there were not seven other archbishops, two of whom are cardinals of at least equal rank, and as though all belonged to one episcopal conference when in fact there are three. The newsmedia like to have authority focussed in an individual. But this can obscure the fact that in all instances authority is meant to be exercised with consultation and sharing and it can give a distorted picture of the role of the pope or of a regional figurehead. The ARCIC statement, as far as one can see, is not taking lessons from television, but rather from Church history and especially from the early centuries. And it sees the need for authority to be centred round an individual at diocesan, regional and international levels. While Roman Catholics may have something to teach about a universal primate, they have much to learn about a regional one. And they will need to be careful not to be misled by the sensationalism of the news media and not to exchange the remote (and ineffectual?) bureaucracy of Rome for the remote and constricting efficiency of another that is apparently nearer home.

But there is a more fundamental difficulty. Is the agreement only an agreement in words? Without wishing to question the genuine sincerity of the signatories and without necessarily denying that there could be a sufficient basis for full ecclesial unity, one can still note that even when all agree on the account of past history and agree on which developments are of permanent value, the weight given to such items may vary considerably. The real and sufficient agreement may not feel like an agreement. Some could accept the lessons from the past on the basis that experience had shown what works and there is providential guidance for later generations as long as they also find that it works. Others may take the lessons from history as a positive command from God that must always be followed. The vast majority of Roman Catholics will accept the decisiveness of tradition quite readily. Even those who believe that all doctrine can be found in scripture will accept very much more help from tradition in unearthing what is implicit in scripture than the 'protestants' whose approach they may seem to share. Communion with the pope is valued highly by Roman Catholics because it is the principal means of union with Catholics throughout the world, because it symbolises

union with the apostolic tradition that goes back to the apostles themselves and because it is seen as the way of fulfilling Christ's will that all believers should be one. So Roman Catholics are ready to put up with limitations and incompetence in the primacy and even with the misuse of authority rather than break from it. (One would wish to add that it is irresponsible to be merely inert and passive when abuses occur.) English and Irish Catholics (and, therefore, many others in English-speaking parts of the world) belong to a recusant tradition in which union with the pope is valued above livelihood and even life itself. Evidently Anglicans will not value union with the pope so highly, for they have survived for four hundred years and more without one. In contrast they value highly the independence of the local church and its traditions. They also value highly the responsibility of the individual believer for the content and quality of his own faith. While these elements are a part of Catholic theory also, they are not in practice rated so highly.

So there are good reasons for Roman Catholics to accept this statement as a basis for negotiations. If it is acceptable also to the Anglican Communion as a whole, then one might begin to measure in months rather than years the time needed to reach full unity. But before the statement can be used as such a basis it is necessary for many more people in both communions to go through the arduous process of discussion and mutual enlightenment which the members of ARCIC have experienced. Members of both Churches need to come to a new appreciation of authority. For Catholics this means a much greater effort to think through the implications of what was taught by the Second Vatican Council and, while observing the tolerance, patience and good humour of Anglicans, to learn how to respect the individual conscience, to leave decision-making as diffused as is reasonably possible and to treat those in authority with co-operative respect rather than critical subservience. Catholics need to appreciate more fully the value of historical scholarship and the insight it gives into the elaboration of theories on the nature of the Church. Anglicans need to learn to use the depth and richness of their historical scholarship (so evident in this statement) as a source for a theory and doctrine of authority. Perhaps Anglicans need to be involved more fully in the process of stabilizing doctrine. For centuries they have been able to enjoy the fruits of the achievements of the early centuries and to criticize the errors and immobile uniformity of Rome while having its confident stability as a point of reference. Catholics can learn the value of the local church epitomized in the regional primate. Anglicans can learn to value the

spaciousness of international relations symbolized by the universal primate.

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### The Agreed Statement on Authority: A Methodist Comment

The question of authority is an extremely difficult one. Such is the cussedness of man at this stage of the human pilgrimage that those 'under authority' may either rebel against an authority that is right in both its substance and its manner or accept with servility an authority abusively claimed or exercised; and those who 'wield authority' may either behave tyrannically in the cause of untruth or shrink from their responsibilities when authoritative decision and action is needed. Christians believe that ultimate authority lies with God the benevolent Creator, whose purpose for humanity is that we should freely 'glorify God and enjoy him for ever'; in God's intention the divine rule and human salvation coincide; God's service is our perfect freedom. Christians further believe that in Jesus Christ we have the definitive revelation of God's purpose for men both as to its content and as to its mode of achievement. While coercive political authority may be the instrument of God's 'left hand' in the restraint of sin, the man at God's right hand is one who took the way of self-giving love. True dominion is not domineering. Divine authority invites free cooperation in the realization of God's loving purpose. To match up to the Church's calling as a witness to the gospel, 'authority in the Church' must follow the pattern of God in Christ. In that way it will participate in the divine authority. The goal is eschatological. Any present exercise is an imperfect approximation.

It would have been worth the while of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission to sketch with rather more detail than is done in paragraph 1 that kind of broad theological background to its third Agreed Statement: Authority in the Church (Venice 1976). Instead the document leaves the impression of a somewhat narrowly 'ecclesiastical' treatment of an awkward problem in 'ecumenical' relations. Perhaps the Commission's terms of reference and its constitution made that inevitable. But ecclesiastical and ecumenical questions cannot properly be removed from the broader theological and cultural context.