

NEWS FROM THE ENGLISH CHURCHES

Volume 6
Bulletins No. 7 and 8
November 1977.

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Publ. by the Interuniversity institute for missiological
and ecumenical research).

The Venice Statement: An Interim Report

Introduction

Reports such as the recently-published Venice Statement from the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (see Bulletin No.2, March, 1977) are generally studied in several more or less distinct phases. The first reactions and off-the-cuff comments usually appear within a few days in the dailies and weeklies. A few months afterwards, the first considered reactions from the experts and the theologians generally begin to appear in the theological and ecumenical journals. At a later stage - if not before - the churches themselves give their official verdicts: either positive, negative or of the "to be filed for further consideration" variety. At this stage, the first comprehensive monographs may also be published. Finally, after a tunnel-period of indeterminate length, such reports eventually become more or less permanent objects to be studied by theologians and historians.

As far as the Venice Statement of 1976 is concerned, we are already well into the second stage. What the general verdict of the scholars is going to be is now fairly obvious; and, on that basis, it can already be safely predicted that the official response from the two churches will be neither positive nor negative. The Venice Statement is what the English call "a curate's egg"; i.e. good in parts.

The important question then is: What next? This is a question which cannot be answered at this stage; because the problem of women's ordination has now become a complicating factor in Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue. If Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue does, however, suffer a major set-back in 1978, it will not be easy to determine in the long run whether it was women's ordination or the question of authority - or papal authority - in the united church of the future that was the real stumbling block. Or even both.

Two points need to be made here in this connexion. First: Canon J. Dessain of Malines/Mechelen is perfectly correct when he suggests that Anglicans should now reconsider the whole question of women's ordination in order to open up the way for Anglican-Roman Catholic reunion; and the eventual reconciliation of Anglican priestly orders (p. 506; titles of articles cited in this number can be found in the select bibliography at the end of this paper).

The Canterbury Statement of 1973 did indeed consider that the recent ARCIC convergence on the nature of the church and the ordained ministry had "put these issues in a new context" (para. 17). But, at that time, the tricky question of authority and primacy had not yet been fully discussed in the international commission. Nevertheless, in 1973 ARCIC considered that their consensus on ministry and ordination offered "a positive contribution to the reconciliation of our churches and of their ministries" (*ibid*). Their last press-statement, issued at the close of the latest meeting at Chichester, hints that women's ordination "would not stop dialogue" (e.g. in Catholic Herald, 7 October 1977). But this does not mean that the goal of the dialogue will not be changed should the Lambeth Conference planned for 1978 give a "green light" for women's ordination throughout the whole of the Anglican Communion.

Meanwhile, the "ecumenical argument" has been widely canvassed within the Church of England itself, as the recent columns of letters in the Church Times amply testifies. The ecumenical argument against the ordination of women to the priesthood presupposes, however, that there will soon be a positive decision on the validity of priests in the Anglican Communion of the male sex that will either reverse, by-pass or supersede the negative decision of Apostolicae Curae (1896). This particular matter is still very much sub judice in Rome (cp. Peter Staples, Church Times, 7 October, 1977). So the second point is whether Rome is now prepared to take a calculated risk at this stage in the dialogue in order to strengthen the ecumenical argument by hinting that male priests in the Anglican Communion will eventually be recognised by the Roman Catholic Church. This would be a risk in the sense that Rome is still waiting for ARCIC to finish its work on the complete package before officially accepting or rejecting any part of its findings.

It is obvious now that the International Commission is not going to complete its work on the subject of authority in the church before the next Lambeth Conference meets in the middle of 1978. (This is yet another indication that the major problem which now confronts ARCIC is the question of timing.) Without some positive hint from Rome that the validity of male orders in the Anglican Communion will be recognized in the not-too-distant future, however, it is doubtful that the "green light" for women's ordination which is widely accepted from Lambeth-1978 will be turned to "orange".

Considered Reactions to The Venice Statement

A definite picture is already beginning to emerge at this stage, though it should also be emphasized that this report is an interim one; because: (a) not all the ecumenical and theological journals have published articles on the Venice Statement; and (b) the editor of this bulletin has not yet had the opportunity to collect all the articles on this subject which are not at his immediate disposal. Nevertheless, this interim report is based upon resources which are by no means inconsiderable; and upon a collection of material which generally gives an accurate and a reliable picture of current developments in the churches of the English speaking world. It is not intended to be a final or even a complete survey.

The Yes-but Response

Most of the responses to the Venice Statement clearly fall into the "yes, but..." category. (Just like the Roman Catholic response to the Ten Propositions of the Churches' Unity Commission which were dealt with in Bulletin No. 7, December 1976.) Furthermore, these "buts" are clearly bigger "buts" when compared with the comparatively minor reservations that were made earlier with respect to the two previous ARCIC statements on the Eucharist and Ministry and Ordination. The most critical Anglican reactions have come from Prof. G.W.H. Lampe ("...for all its good intentions, the document is a failure") and from Hugh Montefiore, the Bishop of Kingston, who has just been appointed to the important See of Birmingham. The latter voted against the proposal to discuss the Venice Statement at local level in its present form on the grounds that:

the statement as it now stands...(contains) at hardly any point in it our Anglican doctrine of authority, apart from what it says about the primacy of Rome. Here there is an uplifting vision which places the Pope in the same kind of position over the universal

Church as our Archbishop of Canterbury holds within our Anglican family. At other points, however, the document seems to be unrealistic, ambiguous from an Anglican point of view. I believe that it would be misleading to discuss it at parochial level as it stands. (Proceedings, pp. 352f.)

In the May number of Theology, he went on to endorse the suggestion "that the Roman Church and the Anglican Communion should draw close into union" in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. "But each Church could do this, while keeping its own traditional ethos and doctrine... For we certainly do not all agree, and it seems that we do not yet understand each other." (See p. 169.) His criticisms have already provoked a spirited defence of the Statement by Henry Chadwick in the September number of Theology to which reference will be made in due course.

The Problem of Papal Authority and its Ecumenical Implications.

It is already clear that the problem of authority in the church, including papal authority, is still the most controversial item on the ARCIC agenda. Furthermore, at the wider ecumenical level, the present situation has become rather confused and paradoxical. For example: although both the Orthodox Churches and the Old Catholics clearly stand much closer to the official Roman Catholic position on the ordination of women (the latter having been powerfully reinforced in October 1976 by what The Times called "a Roman torpedo aimed at Canterbury"), both the Orthodox and the Old Catholics still stand closer to the traditional post-reformation stance of the Church of England with respect to the primacy of the Bishop of Rome than they do to the post-1870 position of the Roman Catholic Church. It is in this particular context that one should point out that a number of Anglican commentators on the Venice Statement have already criticized the large leap of faith in the Venice Statement between the local level (i.e. in the Catholic sense of "the Bishop and his diocese") and the level of universal primacy traditionally claimed in the West by the successor of St. Peter. In the process of making this step, however, the International Commission seems to have overlooked not only the fact that the world-wide Anglican Communion also has a Universal Primate, but also the existence of a number of Orthodox Patriarchs.

Prof. Lampe, for example, stated during the debate on the Venice Statement that was held at the February sitting of the General Synod of the Church of England, that in it:

...we are told that a primate is the bishop of a principal see. But then, by a sleight of hand, we find that it refers almost exclusively to one single bishop of one principle see, the universal primate of Rome. But there are other principal sees; there are other primates and patriarchs. It is very unfortunate that the statement nowhere shows the slightest awareness of the apostolic sees and the patriarchs of the Eastern Churches (Proceedings, p. 347).

The same point was reiterated by the Bishop of St. Albans, who is deeply involved in Anglican-Orthodox relations at the international level. His impression was "that there is much in the statement which will be understood and welcomed by the Orthodox." But he also went on to say that:

At the same time, there is no doubt that the Orthodox will seek, as they often say, further clarification (Proceedings, p. 357).

Bishop Runcie agrees. He also quoted a letter which was published in The Times suggesting that: "It has always been the opinion of the Orthodox that if the Church of Rome would abate its extreme pretensions and cease to organize Uniate Churches they would welcome the Patriarch of Rome as Primus inter Pares" (p. 358). This, he affirmed, would be very close to the attitude adopted by the Anglicans who signed the Venice Statement. But at this point there appeared to be a serious gap in the statement:

Much is made in the statement about the authority of the local bishop and about the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, but the statement is exceedingly vague about other levels of authority or primacy intermediate between the two - metropolitans, patriarchs, autocephalous Churches, such words do not occur, and no doubt they wish to eschew technical terms. But if the Pope is to be regarded as elder brother, primus inter pares, such statements are of little help unless we specify the pares, the brothers. It is not good enough to have the Pope and the diocesan bishops. I do not want an inter-city train between St. Albans and Rome; I want one with some substantial stopping places. There are in the Orthodox tradition not just diocesan bishops but the historic patriarchs and - to show development in their tradition - the heads of contemporary autocephalous or relatively independent Churches. Isolated and taken out of this context, the Roman Primacy becomes the sort of supremacy which the Orthodox Church of the East has never accepted (ibid.).

On the other hand, one searches in vain amongst the comments and reactions that have already been published for a reference to the position of the Old Catholics in this matter. It is all-too-easily forgotten that the Declaration of Utrecht of 1889 rejected not only the 1870 definition of Infallibility, but also the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of December 1854. (These two items also constitute part of ARCIC's unfinished business; see Venice Statement, 24c). Even after all the changes in Roman Catholic thinking and in ecumenical attitudes since Vatican II, the Old Catholics have still not gone much further along the road towards full-communion with the Roman Catholic Church than is envisaged by the terms of the Zurich Note (Züricher Nota) of 1972. Despite the fact that both Roman Catholics and Old Catholics agree on virtually every other point of Catholic doctrine. And despite the fact that Old Catholics and Roman Catholics both agree in adopting the same official stance against the admission of women to the order of priesthood. Apparently, the decisions taken by the First Vatican Council in 1870 are still an unresolved problem in the Old Catholic - Roman Catholic dialogue.

The Old Catholic stance on the subject of papal primacy has also been restated in further statements published by the Old Catholics in 1970, the centenary of Vatican I. A note published in Switzerland adds the dogma of the Assumption which was promulgated in 1950 to the list of difficulties; whilst a declaration from the Old Catholic International Conference of Bishops specifically states that both the theory and the practice of papacy are still stumbling-blocks for Old Catholics. (Though they would accept an ecumenical conciliar fellowship in which the Petrine office is renewed in accordance with its original pastoral character as a service to the universal church.)

J. Lescrauwaet has concluded from these statements that the existence of these outstanding differences explains why the scope of the communicatio

in sacris envisaged in the Zurich Note is restricted to the eucharist and excludes participation in each others ordinations. (See Tijdschrift voor Theologie, 13 (1973), pp. 85 - 86.)

It cannot, therefore, be concluded at the present moment that the way to full-~~communion~~ between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church will be automatically opened by a decision of the Lambeth Conference in 1978 to stop the ordination of women in the Anglican ~~Communion~~. Such a decision would mean only that the way has not yet been closed. Full-~~communion~~ would still seem to presuppose that the Anglicans will eventually be prepared to accept a stance which is even closer to that held by the Church of Rome than the one currently held by the Old Catholics. The first scholarly reactions to the Venice Statement, however, seem to show that the Anglicans are still further from Rome than the Old Catholics are at the present moment.

The fact that papal primacy is still the greatest obstacle along the way to Christian unity is also admitted by Roman Catholics. This fact was reiterated by the Pope himself as recently as 5 April, 1976 (AAS 59 (1976), p. 498). Even the documents of the Second Vatican Council seem to exclude perfect communion unless there is a real acknowledgement of the universal authority of the Pope and communion with him. Other forms of linkage may well be "real": for example, common baptismal status; but they are still apparently considered to be less than perfect. The present situation is still the same. For example, Cardinal Willebrands stated in a recently-published article that:

Of course Vatican II clearly states that according to Catholic doctrine the office of Peter belongs to the Catholicity of the Church. Therefore, full-~~communion~~ and unity, which is the goal of the ecumenical movement, includes necessarily (my italics) communion with the see of Peter (One in Christ, 13 (1977), p. 213).

The Risks Involved in Going Further

What is really positive about the Venice Statement, however, is the fact that the Anglicans have clearly demonstrated their willingness to consider the logic of the ecumenical situation. But, by so doing, they are "taking certain calculated risks with Rome" (cp. Appia, p. 33). One should also add that the Church of England is also taking a calculated risk with its own constituents. This is precisely the reason why the process of evaluating the Venice Statement at diocesan, deanery and even parochial level is going to be the crucial phase for the Anglicans in this particular dialogue.

What kind of risk are the Anglicans taking? Part of the answer to this question can be found by looking back to certain remarks made by Hans Küng on the eve of the Second Vatican Council. For him, the crucial issue for the other Churches was not simply the question of authority in the Church as such. It was, rather, a question of how such authority is exercised in the Vatican. To be acceptable to Christians outside the Roman Catholic Church, however, the whole style of papal primacy would have to change. The Pope would have to become much more the servant of the Church and its pastoral leader; and much less of a "powerful prince of the Church, or a skilled diplomatist, or a highly cultured intellectual aristocrat, or even a splendidly hieratic priestly figure" (The Council and Reunion, 1961, pp. 210f.). The Lambeth Conference of 1968 went on to state that the Pope might be accorded what is called "a primacy of love, implying both honour and service, in a renewed and reunited Church", which shows that Küng had

correctly assessed the Anglican response to Vatican II.

It is certainly true that the documents of Vatican II and many of the papal pronouncements since then, together with the ideal description of the papal office in The Venice Statement itself, do indeed seem to have come much closer to the style of authority which Hans Küng was advocating on the eve of Vatican II; be it noted with the ecumenical situation very much in the forefront of his mind. Nevertheless, it is also true that the older doubts and fears have not yet been fully removed. Both Anglicans and indeed some Roman Catholics have been somewhat confused by the contradictory "signals" which they have recently been receiving from Rome. This leads Anglicans to ask whether the important changes of administrative style since Vatican II are "too good to be true" or misleading and deceptive. In the debate on the Venice Statement in the Anglican Communion, this is bound to be one of the key-questions. Prof. Lampe has already raised this matter in his speech before the General Synod of the Church of England on 18 February, 1977. This passage is so important that it needs to be quoted in full.

As far as the Roman primacy itself goes, the form in which it is set out in the early paragraphs (i.e. of the Venice Statement) makes it acceptable to all of us. There is no question about that. The Petrine texts, which never had anything to do with the papacy anyway, seem at last to have been jettisoned; so has the idea, enshrined in Canon 28 of Chalcedon, that the primacy rests upon the secular status of the city of Rome. Instead, it is grounded, as it already was in the second century, on the seniority and prestige of the local Church of Rome, with its historic association with Peter and Paul. This is all very good. So is the statement's insistence that the Pope has his primacy by virtue of being the bishop of that particular local Church. This means, incidentally, that we should rightly and properly expect the Pope to be an Italian, not the supranational super-bishop envisaged by some misguided papalists, including, I am afraid, Hans Küng.

But all this demands a stupendous revolution. Primacy as set out here is entirely incompatible with the universal primary jurisdiction of the Pope. It means the dismantling of the curia. It means no more encyclicals like Humanae Vitae. We are bound to ask 'Is this too good to be true at present?' I do not want to look a fine gift horse too closely in the mouth, but the last paragraphs of the statement disclose so many old and rickety teeth that one begins to put a grave questionmark against the staying power of the whole animal (Proceedings, p. 347.).

On the other hand, the Methodist commentator Geoffrey Wainwright has rightly indicated that the Venice Statement seems to have been drawn up in a kind of vacuum in which the real world of the "authority crisis" does not appear to loom very large at all.

While it would have been inappropriate for the Commission to pursue a journalistic path, one might have expected the Statement to bear in a sharper form the living marks of a period that has seen the mixed reception given to Humanae Vitae, Hans Küng's Infallible?, and the case of Archbishop Lefebvre...and in which the report of the Church of England's Doctrine Commission on Christian Believing has provided a formal theoretical basis for that well-known Anglican "comprehensiveness" which has recently so perplexed the Catholic co-chairman of ARCIC (p. 196).

One commentator on the Roman Catholic side has also pointed out that the wording of the Venice Statement does not completely exclude the possibility of another Humanae Vitae (Sleddens, p. 73). So the caution which is now being urged on the Anglican side is at least understandable in this particular context. Even if the cautious stance that has been adopted by many Anglicans is not actually endorsed.

Furthermore, one is also reminded that the relevant passages in Lumen Gentium about episcopal collegiality are generally qualified by other statements implying that such collegiality is meaningless in isolation from the universal primacy of the Pope (Sleddens, p. 72). This leads him to suggest that the practical significance of episcopal collegiality as it is expressed in that document would even have to be pressed home point by point (ibid.); though it is not entirely clear here whether he means "in the Roman Catholic Church" or "in the ecumenical dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics". Perhaps he means both? But the commentators rarely go deeply into specific examples relating to the present "crisis of authority" even though they are crucial to the course of the debate. Perhaps there is an unwritten agreement on both sides not to "kick the other man when he is down"? If this is indeed the case, then this could explain why only those commentators who come from neither the Roman Catholic Church nor the Anglican Church give detailed accounts of specific battles in this particular field. The Bishop of Kingston, like Prof. Lampe, only hints at this part of the problem:

Looking at the ferment within the Roman Church (for example Rahner and Küng), and at the differing convictions within the Church of England, it is hard to accept such a statement at face value. Or take the following: '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 mission in the world... They are enabled so to live that the authority of Christ will be mediated through them.' This describes a perfected Church, not the corpus permixtum of saints and sinners of which the present writer is a member. (See Theology, May, 1977, p. 164.).

A glimpse into the recently-published article by E. Glenn Hinson entitled "The Crisis of Teaching Authority in Roman Catholicism", Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 14 (1977), pp. 66 - 88, shows just how wide the gap is between the ideal situation depicted in the Venice Statement and "the recognition that all of the churches today face a very serious challenge in attempting to influence or shape the beliefs and behaviour of their own constituency, to say nothing of those who stand outside that constituency" (p. 66). This writer's previous Bulletin on the Myth of God Incarnate controversy in England also demonstrates that this crisis of authority is not a malady which is currently affecting only Roman Catholics. Nor is it a malady which is confined to the churches. It is, as Wainwright has rightly diagnosed, experienced today "at all points on the scale: the geopolitical, the national, the local, the smallest social unit, the individual" (p. 196).

He could also have mentioned the family, the level at which Humanae Vitae produced the greatest crisis of conscience of all. On the one hand, it has been said that: "By making exaggerated and unverifiable claims, authority lost both credit and credibility". And on the other: "Every parish priest is perfectly well aware of the existence of the gap between theory and practice. Whatever he may think about it, he would not dream of denying that it exists." (See P. Hebblethwaite, The Runaway Church, 1975, p. 216.)

If these are accurate assessments, then the gap between the ideal Koinonia described in the Venice Statement and the harsh world in which authority is enforced and also, on occasions, rejected is indeed a serious one which cannot be ignored.

Again, Wainwright is also quite correct in indicating that no serious attempt has yet been made to take into account the fact that there is and has been serious conflict within the church (p. 197). (And not just conflict between the separated churches, but also within them.) It is at precisely this point that the ARCIC methodology begins to reveal an inherent weakness. Strategically, it was right to begin with an attempt "to get behind the opposed and entrenched positions of past controversies" (Venice Statement, para. 25). It was also right to avoid "the vocabulary of past polemics" (ibid.). But having completed this part of the exercise, there is still a good deal of unfinished business on the table. The International Commission is indeed aware of this; but the convergence between the two churches of which the documents rightly speak does not yet touch the positions that have already been adopted by the traditionalists and the progressives in each church. Paradoxically, the traditionalists and the progressives in each church have also converged on some issues with their opposite numbers; but this does not mean that they have converged upon the ARCIC consensus in the process. The ARCIC convergence can indeed be called a "new context"; but the crisis of authority and the emergence of polarisation in both churches have also produced a "new context" of quite a different kind. Finally, the growing pains of the post-industrial society, which clearly underlie the present crisis of authority, constitute yet another "new context" which will have to be taken into account before the church can be successfully united.

Meanwhile, ARCIC's attempt to define a new style of primatial authority will certainly be given a cordial but cautious welcome; but the caution will have to be interpreted in the context of the course of events before and after the publication of 29 July 1968 of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae. If Norman St. John Stevas is correct when he states that: "The Encyclical was an attempt both to find a solution to a moral dilemma and to stem the undermining of papal authority and to reassert it in the old style" (quoted by Hebblethwaite, p. 209, my italics), then Anglicans will surely need to be convinced in the near future that the style of the Petrine Office has indeed changed before they accept the ideal description of it in the Venice Statement at its face value. Furthermore, not only Anglicans, but also many ecumenically-minded Roman Catholics as well, would obviously begin to feel much happier if the distinction between papal authority and papal power could be seen in practice to be an absolute one. The reunion of the church which was envisaged in the Common Declaration of 1966 may ultimately depend as much upon this as on any other factor. And without it the risks involved on the Anglican side would seem to be too great to contemplate taking.

The Cautious Welcome

These "buts" are all considerable, and there are still more to come; but they should not be allowed to overbalance the widespread welcome which the Venice Statement has already received in Anglican circles. The Dean of Ripon, for example, even sees it as a kind of ecumenical miracle: that is "as something which has no right to happen" (Proceedings, p. 368). A similar point of view was also expressed in the General Synod by the Rt. Rev. John

Trillo (Bishop of Chelmsford) when he moved: "that this synod welcomes the recent publication by the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission of its Agreed Statement on Authority and commends it for study and discussion in the dioceses." Furthermore, he also believes that ARCIC has indeed reached an extraordinary consensus on the doctrine of the eucharist and ministry.

Many felt that a similar consensus could not possibly be reached on the crucial question of authority. I, and I am sure many of you, rejoice that so great an accord has been reached.

And again:

Of course, doctrinal statements cannot by themselves bring unity, but the three statements on the Eucharist, Ministry and Authority mark a remarkable, not to say miraculous step forward and clear the air for further advance in mutual understanding (Proceedings, pp. 338 and 343).

Unfortunately, however, not everyone seemed to be equally optimistic about what happens after the miracle. The Dean of Ripon even went on to remind the General Synod that after "the surprise of the Holy Spirit" (which is how Cardinal Suenens has defined a miracle, p. 368), the next stage can indeed be quite a different matter altogether." A few days across the Red Sea and one finds oneself complaining about the Sinai water supply" (p. 369). He could also have referred in this particular context to the temptation to look back to the better life in Egypt: "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic; but now..." (Num. 11.5).

It should be stressed, however, that none of these critics of the Venice Statement wants to look back in this way. On the contrary, they all want to press forwards. The Bishop of Kingston even affirmed in his article that the Venice Statement:

...is so important a document that it deserves more serious consideration. If in the course of this article its arguments do not find favour, this is not because the present writer is against closer relations between the two Churches. On the contrary he would favour immediate inter-
communion between Rome and Canterbury, and...he would even hope that some mutual recognition of ministries could be agreed. At the same time care must be taken lest warmth of heart should blind us to the truth that the two Churches, by tradition and by practice, have differing conceptions of authority in the Church (Theology, May, 1977, p. 164).

He reiterated his position in the debate in the General Synod on 18 February, 1977: "I have a great and genuine admiration for those who attempted this statement and a firm adherence to the ecumenical movement, which cannot be complete without the Church of Rome....None the less, with great regret, I must vote against the motion; even in its amended forms." (See Proceedings, p. 352.)

At the close of his speech he also expressed the hope that: "...it would be possible for our two communions...to enter into the closest relationships while each respects the integrity of the other and each retains its own distinctive ways of expressing truth in faith and order". (p. 354).

Prof. Lampe was no less generous with his praise for the work of the International Commission. He also wants to go forward and not backwards. This becomes clear when we read the following: "We here and now have fully enough in common with our Roman Catholic brethren to enable us both together

to seek the Grace of Our Lord in shared communion, to obtain from him the grace of fuller unity, the grace which will enable us to solve even these extremely difficult problems which lie ahead - grace, in fact, to make that much deeper and more far-reaching reappraisal of our ideas about authority in the Church than the Commission has yet given us" (Proceedings, p. 349).

Whether these alternative possibilities are realistic in the present ecumenical situation is, of course, another question. For example, Prof. Henry Chadwick, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and also an Anglican member of the International Commission, has already criticized Bishop Montefiore's stance in a rejoinder which was published in Theology in September 1977. He specifically chides his Anglican colleague for recommending:

...a faster and less exhausting route to the summit, by cable-car rather than by painful rock-climbing with rope and ice-axe (p. 325).

Instead, Montefiore had suggested that:

We should begin...by simply establishing 'immediate intercommunion' between Rome and Canterbury after which, on the ground of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, perhaps there may follow 'some mutual recognition of ministries'. Meanwhile each Church must 'keep its own traditional ethos and doctrine', a proposition evidently to be taken in the maximal sense that quests for theological convergence are a waste of energy on the wrong objectives. Let us rather enjoy being parallel lines not destined to meet this side of infinity and eternity (Chadwick, ibid.).

Even if this retort is left on one side for the time being, it is quite clear that none of these critics wants to go backwards. The question is still how to get to the summit. In other words, this grumbling in the ecumenical wilderness needs to be distinguished from that of the Numbers 11. 5 variety, which appears to be of a quite different kind. Here the grumbling is more about a series of (alleged) gaps and ambiguities in the map which ARCIC has just given us of the ecumenical Promised Land. Furthermore, it is also quite clear that these objections to the Venice Statement are in an entirely different category when compared with those of the anti-papalists in the Church of England at the popular level (and the latter still do exist). In any case, the next stage in the debate will doubtless concentrate upon the question of how far all this "grumbling" is justified.

The Role of The Intellectuals in The Debate

A further complicating factor in the complex interplay of forces comprising the Church officials, the intellectuals (i.e. some bishops and the academics) and Anglican popular religion is the fact that at the parish level the theologians of the Church of England are frequently held to be "in bad odour" nowadays. A factor which has also to be considered when assessing what weight to place upon the response of the Anglican intellectuals in the theological and ecumenical journals; and also upon their speeches on the floor of the General Synod.

This mood of hostility towards the intellectuals can easily be traced back to the Honest to God debate of the sixties. It has recently been reinforced by the latest report of the official Church of England Doctrine Commission (Christian Believing); and, more recently, by the Myth of God Incarnate controversy. As Bishop Montefiore correctly stated in his article in May, the Anglican doctrine of pluralism (as stated in Christian Believing) "is as hard for others to grasp as the Anglican doctrine of disseminated

authority" (p. 168); including, as Geoffrey Wainwright rightly noted, Bishop Alan Clarke, the Roman Catholic Co-chairman of the International Commission. The latter eventually articulated his perplexity on this particular matter in a letter to The Times on 24 May 1977 (p. 196). But his perplexity is also shared by not a few Anglicans, as Bishop Montefiore has readily admitted:

But Anglicans must not blame other communions for their failure to understand or to take seriously the Reports of the Church of England's Doctrine Commission. Since publishing Christian Believing the Doctrine Commission has, up to the time of writing, actually gone out of existence! Its latest Report has been greeted with an indifference bordering on hostility on the part of the Church of England; and it is noteworthy that its General Synod has decided to debate the joint Anglican Roman Catholic Report. (i.e. The Venice Statement) rather than to discuss the nature of Christian Belief as held among its own members (p. 169).

At least we have some indication now of where the land lies. A further indication is the fact that the recently-announced translation of Bishop Montefiore to the Diocese of Birmingham has been openly criticized in some quarters of the Church of England.

The Ideal and The Real: the Ought and the Is.

The Catholic commentator Cuthbert Rand has said that the Venice Statement is "a statement of what they (i.e. all members of the respective churches) 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" (p. 186). But one wonders how far this really is the case? Are there no Anglicans who agree with Bishop Montefiore? Are there no Roman Catholics who think like Hans Küng? And are there no Roman Catholics who think and act like Archbishop Lefebvre? If the answer to all three questions is: "But yes there are", then this surely confirms that the philosophers of Oxford and Cambridge were right after all when they repeatedly issued their warnings about the dangers of confusing an "ought" with an "is". The International Commission was certainly aware of this danger, as the preface to the Venice Statement amply testifies:

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 (p. 3).

There are now two schools of thought on this particular subject: the former is reflected in Wainwright's comment that the International Commission appears to believe that "whatever is, is right" (p. 196); and the latter in Henry Chadwick's spirited defence of the Venice Statement, particularly when the latter raises the question of whether Bishop Montefiore's complaint that it "sets out an ideal, not an empirical actuality or possibility, to say nothing of probability" and "confuses what ought to be the case with what is the case" is really as damaging as it may seem to those who have never tried to construct a doctrine of the Church in coherent terms" (p. 327). Chadwick answers this question in the following way:

A satisfactory exposition of the essential being of the Church can hardly be attempted at all if the data available exclude any element of the ideal and heavenly and are strictly confined to the not too

militant community of frail believers whose treasure is in very earthen vessels (ibid.).

It is not possible to quarrel with such an answer. Yet the same problem still refuses to vanish; even though the goal has been formulated in ideal terms. As Wainwright states on p. 198:

...the Statement has no theological account to give of the fact of cases in which, as a matter of history, no resolution of the conflict has taken place. Is it not a 'docetic' ecclesiology which fails to take into account the Church-splitting failures of history adequately into account? (p. 198).

To this one should also add a reference to the conflicts which are actually taking place in the church today as well as a reference to the possibility of further conflicts still to come in the future. It is at precisely this stage in the argument that some commentators begin to suspect that the significance of this alleged gap between the "ideal" and the "real" has been obscured by premature appeals to the indefectibility of the Church, the infallibility of popes, and the inerrancy of councils. For it is at precisely these points that the problem of the "ideal" and the "real" becomes a crucial one. Wainwright is quite specific on this point when he goes on to say that:

Despite a slight hint in its last sentence (i.e. "that is why the Church in spite of its failures, can be described as indefectible"), the last section of paragraph 18 seems limited to the failures of individuals while leaving 'the Church' intact. Similarly, paragraph 12 acknowledges that 'the conduct of the occupant of this (primatial) see (of Rome) has been unworthy of his office' - but the papal primacy remains intact as an institution (ibid.).

This is the nub of the problem. Given the notion of the indefectibility of the Church, the inerrancy of ecumenical Councils, and the infallibility of popes, such problems should not ideally arise! On the other hand, the International Commission has also been honest enough to admit that in practice such things can and do indeed happen. But what then? This is the crucial question which many Anglicans would doubtless like to have answered. For example, Prof. Lampe is certainly very unhappy that so many loose ends have been left undone at this stage of the commission's work.

He makes three points in his speech to the General Synod about these difficulties. First, if ARCIC believes that it is God rather than the Church who is indefectible, then it is a pity they did not say this. Second, there is a change of emphasis between paragraphs 15 and 19 on the subject of conciliar formulations. Whereas the former states that they can be improved, restated and revised, the latter "reverts to that old and most unsatisfactory Roman Catholic distinction between defined dogma and other theological formulations, and in respect of defined dogma it is claimed that councils are protected from error" (p. 348). He reiterates here traditional Anglican objections to the notion of conciliar inerrancy (see Article 21) and continues as follows:

To say that general councils are protected from error as long as they base their definitions on Scripture is to revert to a pre-critical way of looking at these things. The development of both biblical criticism and historical study has shown clearly that neither Nicaea nor Chalcedon nor any other of the councils could read its doctrines straight out of Scripture. They were interpreting Scripture, and in our interpretation of Scripture we may err.

Third, he finally goes on to state that paragraph 20 of the Venice Statement is even worse: To begin with, its meaning is not entirely clear; at least on a first reading. But: "when read in its context it definitely seems to imply recognition of the authority of the Pope as well as a council to define dogma" (ibid.).

For Prof. Lampe:

These are not simply loose ends of unfinished business; they are largely the nub of the matter of primacy. The fact that they are unfinished puts a question mark against those very encouraging paragraphs in the earlier part of the statement. That is why I wish the report had not been submitted to the Churches until much more exploration of those vital questions had taken place (ibid.).

Prof. D.R. Jones shares some of these reservations and misgivings; though he also praises the international commission for looking behind "the entrenchments and the traditional battlelines" and seeking the "deeper agreements" behind them. He even thinks that the three agreed statements actually resemble Anglican documents! ("There is nothing in them which does not have its counterpart in honoured Anglican Theology", Proceedings , p. 344). Yet even Prof. Jones also shares Prof. Lampe's misgivings at this point:

There is, however, one area where some of us would wish to enter a strong caveat. What the Bishop of Chelmsford has said does not altogether calm me on this matter. This caveat does not concern the Roman primacy in the first instance. The Roman primacy is as harmless as the primacy of Canterbury - until it is combined with inerrancy. I think that the document on authority gets very near to saying that ecumenical councils may be inerrant in matters of faith, and my caveat is on matters of inerrancy. The document describes the Church, in spite of its failures, as indefectible, a term, incidentally, which needs the most careful definition, because it is supposed not to mean infallibility. The document says: 'When the Church meets in ecumenical council, its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous...These judgements are by the same Spirit protected from error'.

Now, I will affirm with anyone that the Spirit leads us into all truth. I will affirm a high degree of authority to the councils of the undivided Church. But that authority is one that every age has freely to see for itself. I will acknowledge their findings to be true because I see them to be true, and not because I am told that they are inerrant. This admits the possibility that a generation should arise - I do not think that it will, but it admits the possibility - who finds them in some sense misleading or inadequate. We need those who are prepared to question and pose ever afresh the questions of truth. There are some Roman theologians who would agree. But the primacy of truth is not secure unless we hold to the truth of our own Article that councils are assemblies of men and may err. Put the two together, and we are safe. Separate them, and I believe that we are not. The statement omits this element of the truth. We touch here on a sensitive nerve of the historic Anglican ethos which, in my opinion, is the secret of our intellectual freedom and the precondition of our finest scholarship. Our Roman Catholic brethren must get this message loud and clear.

For it is when you hold to the inerrancy of councils that the Roman Catholic primacy becomes a problem (Proceedings, pp. 345f.).

This is both the nub of the matter as well as the exposed Anglican "nerve". Prof. Anthony Hanson has made exactly the same comment in his note. It is not necessary to repeat all the details. Of paragraph 19 he says: "I do not think God has given us any such guarantee, although I accept what the statement says about the indefectibility of the Church. And secondly, I do not think that most Anglicans will ever be persuaded to accept the concept of infallibility (para. 24c), no matter how reasonably and moderately it be presented. The whole concept has too much inherent ambiguity to be capable of being satisfactorily defined." (See One in Christ, 13(1977), p. 188.)

The problem now is to see how Anglicans and Roman Catholics can come to a satisfactory agreement on the subject of authority in the church which: (a) acknowledges the fact that the Church will not fail in the long run (the "soft" definition of "indefectible", the harder definition being "perfect, not liable to defect"); and (b) acknowledges the authority of both councils and primatial authority without (c) at the same time making inflated theological claims on behalf of fallible persons and fallible institutions.

This exercise is not impossible once another gap in the International Commission's presentation is properly plugged with a reference to the charisma of prophets. Furthermore, this stance is quite consistent with the commission's acceptance of the fact that, for example, even a pope can be unworthy of his office (para. 12) and even some councils have not been ratified as ecumenically-binding councils (e.g. Ariminum, 359 AD., Ephesus, 449, and the "council" of 754).

The Prophetic Hiatus in the Venice Statement

Again, it is Geoffrey Wainwright who has once more put his finger on the right spot; but he is also supported in this case both by Oscar Cullmann and by Hans Küng. The former states on page 199 that:

The recognition in paragraph 4 of the 'authority of holiness' is welcome: 'By the inner quality of their life (some individuals) win a respect which allows them to speak in Christ's name with authority.' But informal, unofficial, personal authority may also from time to time take on a prophetic aspect. Such holy and prophetic individuals may clash with officially instituted authority. What is the theological significance of such a conflict, and what is the proper practical response in face of it? (p. 199).

This is surely a fair point; because the charisma of the prophet is not explicitly recognized in the ecclesiology underlying the agreed statements of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. This is strange given the fact that the terms of reference of the commission were to discover what Anglicans and Roman Catholics held in common on the basis of "the Gospels and...the ancient common traditions" of the Church. Küng has rightly reminded his readers that, alongside the apostles, the prophets and teachers also have "a special authority in the Church" (The Church, 1971⁴, p. 433). This should surely never be overlooked. Certainly, the apostles have what he calls a "charismatic order of preference"; simply because they were "the original witnesses of the risen Lord, sent out by him and authorized to preach in his name". In the second place, however, the prophets appear alongside the apostles as the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2.20). They too have been chosen and authorized by God (p. 186). They worked not only in the Pauline

communities (e.g. 1 Cor. 12-14) and in Rome, but also in Palestine and Syria; as well as in Asia Minor (p. 396). Furthermore: "In the list of charisms they are always mentioned immediately after the apostles and before any other ministries; alongside the apostles they are the most important members of the community. Thus the Church is not only built upon the apostles, but "upon the foundation, the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2.20). "Through them the spirit expresses himself directly".

It is in this context that Wainwright's initial criticism of the Venice Statement becomes much clearer:

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. ... 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" (p. 195).

Again, Prof. Lampe makes a similar objection: "First, it is not about authority in the Church; it is almost entirely about who exercises it (p. 346). Although his objection is initially open to the further objection that no discussion of authority can divorce it entirely from 'authoritative persons', it is quite clear that this is not quite what he means. What he really means is surely that the ARCIC presentation jumps far too quickly from the discussion of the nature of authority to the exercise of authority by authoritative persons in the Church: i.e. bishops and Roman primates (also when meeting in Council). A proper discussion of the nature of authority in the church would surely have required some recognition of the authoritative voice of the prophets. Instead, we search in vain through the ARCIC documents for a recognition of prophetic authority. The nearest the commission ever comes to the charism of prophecy is in paragraph 15 of the Venice Statement: "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". But this cannot be constructed as an adequate recognition of either the authority or the vocation of the true prophet.

In other words, the rather meagre discussion of the nature of authority in the Venice Statement is prematurely foreclosed by the treatment of a limited number of categories of authoritative persons. But whilst it is true that the International Commission has indeed taken great pains to describe the various links between the people of God at the local level, the ordained clergy who minister to them, the episcopal college, and the universal primate (i.e. the Bishop of Rome), the Venice Statement does seem to suggest that if papal primacy, ecumenical councils and diocesan bishops in communion with the See of Rome were to be removed from this framework of ecclesiastical authority, the whole structure of that authority would somehow collapse in the process. It is at this particular point that the authoritative character of genuine charismatic prophecy in the world is absolutely essential.

At this stage it should also be said that there is always a constant tension in the structure of the church between the charisma of the institutional church and the more critical (and sometimes even unofficial) charisma of prophets. Indeed, this particular tension has been recognised at least

since the time when St. Paul wrote his second Letter to the Corinthians. Fortunately, however, this tension between the charisma of the official institution and the charisma of (unofficial) prophecy is both benign and creative. Like other "buildings", the Church carries within its structures a number of stresses and strains that constantly pull against each other. Paradoxically, it is precisely the strength of these opposing forces that maintains the equilibrium of the whole structure and also maintains it in its intended position. There is no danger of strain as long as these forces are maintained in equilibrium. Indeed, architects have to take great care to ensure that there is no single element in the structure which over-balances the rest; but they do this by balancing them all out, and not by elimination.

The real danger, however, comes when one or other of these forces is eliminated or weakened. It is then that there is the greatest danger of serious structural collapse. As far as God's 'building' the Church is concerned, O. Cullmann has already spelled out some of the dangers inherent in the neglect by the Church of the God-given Charisma of prophecy in a recent article (Faith and Unity, 21 (1977), pp. 30f.) in which he states that:

Distortions of this charism (i.e. the charismatic gift of monarchical authority in the church) ...take the form of a legalism, a disturbance of the balance between prophecy and institution - in favour of the latter, the abandonment of collegial control and the abuse of power (p. 30).

The same line of criticism has also been pursued by John Drury in a rather acidly-worded Editorial in Theology (May, 1977) that nevertheless deserves to be cited at some length in order to fill out the picture. The Christ depicted in the Venice Statement, he avers:

...is not the one of the gospels who stood against the comparable authoritative structures of his day and was disowned by them. Rather, he gives the mandate for our institutional arrangements. The Spirit bloweth not where it listeth so much as acting as a kind of institutional major domo or tutor. This all but ignores (there is a reference to inspired individuals at para. 4) material integral and central to the discussion of religious authority in a Christian framework ('not as the scribes', those careful preservers and restaters of tradition). It must be included in the future. Authority in the Church has been exercised by Kierkegaard who ostentatiously sat in his club on Sunday mornings, by the lonely, ecclesiastically unassimilated figure of Charles Péguy; and by Simone Weil who doggedly and articulately refused baptism. These are not the sort of scribal theologians whom the statement approves, but they have major biblical precedents. And who will deny that they followed Christ in the Spirit or that they authoritatively correct our constant solipsisms? If we forget such people and such tradition we may arrive at our Italian ecumenical destination sooner, but only to discover that something absolutely indispensable has been left behind (p. 162).

This objection is justified even if it is also one-sided; because the charisma of institution is also part of the parallelogramme of forces incorporated into the Church. But because his editorial is intended to be a correction of an equally one-sided position, it can certainly be accepted in a new context in which justice is done to the successors of both apostles and prophets. This, after all, is the foundation of the Church (see above). An earlier statement is also acceptable in this new context, namely: "...the general tone (i.e. of the Venice Statement)

comes through - and is unfortunately marked by a somewhat cloying institutional solipsism" (ibid.). Provided, that is, that one also recognises that an appeal to the authority of prophets has its dangers too. There are always false prophets as well as the true ones; and it ill behoves the church to lose its ability to distinguish between these two varieties. Wainwright has rightly spotted this difficulty too; albeit in another context. He says:

In a pluralistic world, where are we to stand in order to decide whether the varied voices claiming to speak (God's) truth blend in a rich harmony or rather constitute a cacophony of contradictions? (p. 196).

In the final analysis - and this is surely what all these separate points collectively add up to - it is difficult to pin down either in scripture or even in the tradition of the undivided church any one, exclusive and final court of appeal: neither primates, nor bishops (e.g. Küng); neither ecumenical councils (Article 21) nor ecclesiastical majorities in General Synods; nor yet the vociferous prophets claiming the inspiration of the Holy Spirit appear at the end of the day to have an exclusive monopoly of authority in the Church. (The only monopoly which can reasonably be claimed is surely the ultimate authority that is claimed by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.)

None of the authorities (and authoritative bodies) which exist on this earthly plane can safely be eliminated from the exceedingly complex authority structure of the Church without doing violence to the whole of the edifice. Furthermore, it is only the hope that the Holy Spirit will not simultaneously desert primates, councils, synods and prophets that allows the Church to make any sense at all out of that excruciatingly troublesome word "indefectible" (when applied to the Church) without either falling into the error of undervaluing any single one or more of these "authorities" or falling into the opposite error of overvaluing them.

As Prof. D.R. Jones rightly reminded the General Synod of the Church of England in the first of his final "but-clauses": for Anglicans "there is no inerrancy, no infallibility, not even for those who crave this kind of security. ... Sometimes it means living dangerously, and yet we have learned to live with an adequate sense of authority. Let us, then, receive and welcome these remarkable statements of consensus, but at the same time reaffirm the substance of our own Article (i.e. that councils are assemblies of men and may err). Let us acknowledge the Spirit leading us slowly into all truth, but never forget our fallibility and limitation - not least in Synod - and that there is never an absolute guarantee that we do not refract the light we are meant to reflect" (see Proceedings, p. 346). (Though he also overlooks the possibility that one can live too dangerously!)

John Drury makes a similar point in his Editorial:

Truth is also notoriously elusive in the matter of the inerrancy - or whatever it is - of popes and councils. Even the excellent commentary by Chadwick and Yarnold (Truth and Authority, 1977) cannot quite blow away the fog of a world in which what is said is by no means quite what is meant and it is not certain exactly what it is all about anyway" (pp. 161f.).

The matter would surely become much clearer if the charisma of authoritative prophecy were to be restored to its rightful position in the discussion of

what the subtitle of the Venice Statement calls: the question of authority, its nature, exercise, and implications.

On the other hand, the statement itself does contain an explicit acknowledgement in paragraph 7 that: "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." This is quite true. But, without a proper understanding of the role of prophecy in the Church, it is not easy to know what to do about the prophets whom God calls to make precisely this kind of summons. The traditional answer has been to stone them and crucify them and listen to their message afterwards. This may, indeed, be one way in which their message is authenticated and declared to be authoritative for the Church; but this still leaves open the question of how to distinguish between, say, a Dietrich Bonhoeffer and someone like Joseph Smith.

Whilst it is true to say that Anglicans have the greatest respect for the "authorities" - i.e. primates, councils, scriptures, even on occasions the prophets - there is a widespread reluctance to ascribe either infallibility or inerrancy to all four authorities simultaneously. Furthermore, it is precisely those who appeal to the inerrancy of the scriptures who are most likely to refuse to accept the infallibility of the Bishop of Rome. This difficulty is candidly acknowledged by the International Commission in paragraph 24 c; but even the qualifications contained in the rest of paragraph 24 c and in 24 d will still probably be insufficient to sway the balance.

What Next?

Under these circumstances, the best course of action would probably be an attempt to redraft the Venice Statement in such a way that the supreme authority of primates, councils, scriptures and prophets is acknowledged whilst at the same time recognising the real possibility that human beings can and do fail. This would involve three steps. First, the authority of scriptures and the charismatic authority of prophets would have to be brought more sharply into focus. Secondly, the various disclaimers in the text which do acknowledge the fallibility of human instruments would have to be restated in such a way that the theological claims which are presently being made for primates (i.e. popes) and councils (and also for prophets and scriptures) on an individual basis are not set too high. Thirdly, a "soft" definition of indefectibility (i.e. God will not ultimately desert his Church, cp. Chadwick, p. 328) would have to be based on the hope that these various authorities in the Church will not fail to reveal what God's will is for the Church simultaneously. God will surely have the last authoritative word; even if it is spoken by the last prophet or the last man or woman to follow the God-given dictates of conscience.

The question now is whether such an understanding of authority in the Church would also commend itself to Roman Catholics. Some are indeed already thinking along these lines. For example, Norman St. John-Stevan states in the current issue of the Catholic Herald (28 October, 1977) that:

the concept of the papacy formulated by the First Vatican Council is incompatible with ecumenical advance: the idea of other Churches making their "submission" (revealing phrase) to Rome is a fantasy: there cannot be a reunion without radical alterations in the mentality and organisation of the Roman curia.

On the other hand the concept of the papacy which gained currency through the pontificate of Pope John and the work of the Second Vatican Council, as a centre of service both to Catholics and non-Catholics, has almost unlimited capacity for development and would prove attractive to many to whom the curial mentality is anathema.

The best contribution the Catholic Church in England could make would be to contribute to a developing concept of the papacy by moving into union with the Church of England. Were such a reconciliation to come about the role of the papacy would have to alter.

On the other hand, Wainwright rightly records what he calls "a strange omission" in the Venice Statement; namely the fact that the word conscience does not appear in it at all (p. 200). This is an oversight which can easily be rectified given the prominent part which the concept of the human conscience has always played in Catholic moral theology. Anglicans and Roman Catholics both agree that a man must always act in accordance with his conscience. Catholic moral theologians also allow for the possibility that in some circumstances the human conscience "and not the will or the wish of authority is the decisive voice" (E. Welty, O.P., A Handbook of Christian Social Ethics, Vol. 1, 1960, p. 133); provided that the "authorities" have been carefully considered and it is realized that one can also be mistaken. Finally, Gaudium et Spes (para. 16) also confirms that: "His conscience is man's secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."

Ambiguities and Distortions

Many of the Anglican commentators on the Venice Statement have already complained in various ways about these and other gaps in the statement. There is virtually a consensus on this point. Miss R.C. Howard also referred to these difficulties during the debate in the General Synod when she said that:

The major problem is precisely that it (The Venice Statement) has not dealt with the main question of authority; it has dealt with the question of authority as it leads to the question of the papacy. To some degree this has distorted the whole pattern of the discussion (Proceedings, pp. 370 f.).

She then went on to add that in the case of agreed statements: "They must leave things out, and one must look for what is left out. For example, a whole range of questions about ministry that Anglicans want to ask are not answered. The statement on Ministry is full of gaps, precisely because it is an agreed statement. This is a profoundly important thing that we must say to people at the Synod below this." (Ibid.) This is not, however, the full extent of her difficulties; because she also suggested that there are contradictions and ambiguities in the text which will also have to be ironed out during the forthcoming discussions in the Diocesan Synods. There is also another emerging consensus on the subject of these alleged ambiguities. Primarily, these are encountered in connexion with the two transliterated words episcopo and koinonia; but also in connexion with the tricky word "indefectibility". This criticism is also echoed at the beginning of Andrew Louth's article in Faith and Unity:

The Venice Statement ...deserves to be accepted by Anglicans without reserve, if not without qualification. ...Not that the Statement is free from the drawbacks of the earlier Statements, there is still a

certain studied (i.e. deliberate) ambiguity...(p. 26).

That ambiguity was perhaps inevitable at this particular stage in the dialogue; but the various Anglican Synods will certainly want to know which of the various possible interpretations of these disputed passages they are being urged to accept. One ambiguity has already been resolved by Prof. Chadwick, namely the sense in which the Commission used the word "indefectible" in paragraph 18 of the Venice Statement. This can, and indeed has, been taken to mean "perfect", "not liable to defect", or "the absence of spots and blemishes in the empirical Church" (Chadwick, p. 328). (This is what is called here the "hard" definition of the word "indefectibility".) It is incompatible, however, with the various admissions in the text that both the Church and its authorities have on occasions failed to live up to the ideal standards. On the other hand, there is no contradiction here if the Commission is using this term in accordance with the "soft" definition: i.e. "will not fail, succumb to exhaustion, die out, suffer eclipse (ibid.).

Chadwick assures us that it is the second of these two senses which is intended here; though he also goes on to admit that: "perhaps it was a little imprudent of the Commission even to mention a rare Latin technical term, imprecise and open to misconstruction" (ibid.). In other cases, however, e.g. the famous footnote in the Windsor Statement on the meaning of "transsubstantiation" and the note on "infallibility" in paragraph 24 of the Venice Statement, the Commission has already clarified the meaning of controversial terminology of a technical nature. It would, surely, have been much better here to have included another footnote to explain this term too? Lampe has also made a similar point in this connexion: "A minor point is that paragraph 18 insists on describing the Church as indefectible, when it means that God is faithful and because he is faithful he can be trusted not to desert his Church. It is God who is indefectible, not the Church. What a pity the Commission could not actually say so!" (Proceedings, p. 348).

More serious, however, are the criticisms relating to the two transliterated terms episcopate and Koinonia; especially if Sleddens is right in regarding these two terms and their mutual relationships as the focal-point of the Venice Statement and the context in which the closing paragraphs about the primacy of the Bishop of Rome should be evaluated and understood (p. 73).

In this connexion, Prof. Lampe also complained - and not for the first time - during the course of the February sittings of the General Synod that there is considerable confusion with respect to the right interpretation of these two untranslated terms:

It is perhaps a pity that the report so often uses the Greek word Koinonia in the sense of 'community', when in the New Testament it is not used in that concrete sense but means participation. I am not just being pedantic on a little point. Greek words in English documents tend to disguise ambiguity. 'Episcopate' sometimes means oversight in general; it can also mean the office of a bishop in particular. We all know the confusion that results from oscillation between those two meanings. (He was presumably referring at this point to the Anglican-Presbyterian conversations of fifteen years or so ago, which came to grief on this very point.) Koinonia seems to me to be used in this document with a considerable amount of oscillation between the community of the faithful and fellowship, not in the concrete sense of community but in the abstract, and I fear confusion there as well" (Proceedings, p. 347; he went on to complain of further

ambiguities in the use of the concept of primacy/primate, to which reference has already been made, see above).

It is at precisely this point that the question of ambiguity also begins to overlap with the problem of the ideal and the real exercise of episcopate, and the ideal and the reality of (imperfect) communion which has already been mentioned here in a different context. The Bishop of Kingston has also pointed out, for example, that statements in the Venice document to the effect that Bishops can 'require the compliance necessary' do not tally with the exercise of episcopacy as Anglicans have traditionally received it (p. 165). Furthermore, the Venice Statement:

seems to the present writer to come down fairly and squarely on the Roman Catholic side of the fence (ibid.).

He then goes on to quote a lengthy passage from a report of the Lambeth Conference of 1948, which includes the following words, to clinch this argument:

It may be said that authority of this kind is much harder to understand and obey than authority of a more imperious character. This is true and we glory in the appeal which it makes to faith... . As in human families the father is the mediator of this divine authority, so in the family of the Church is the bishop, the Father-in-God, wielding his authority in virtue of his divine commission and in synodical association with his clergy and his laity, and exercising it in humble submission, as himself under authority (p. 166).

Epilogue

Despite the gaps and the ambiguities, there is also a growing consensus that this particular dialogue should continue until it brings forth fruit. In this sense, the present state of the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue can be described as "promising". On the other hand, nobody is underestimating the difficulties that have been mentioned above or claiming that there is a quick and easy solution for them; though this again raises the question of whether all is well with the timing of the dialogue, because there appears to be little time left in which to plug the gaps and eradicate the ambiguities before the present authority crisis in the Church becomes even worse than it is at the moment.

Part of the answer may be the realisation that the age of Constantine is over and that the Church is painfully trying to learn to live again in a very different world. If this is so, then we must also raise the question of whether precisely the same pattern of authority that the Church had in the Constantinian era is now necessarily required in the Post Industrial society; and if not, then what should it be? In this connexion, one could probably do much worse than begin again with Dom Gregory Dix's judicious assessment of the change in the pattern of authority which coincided with the transformation of the early church into the official church of "Christendom". Mr. T.L. Dye actually referred to his work (Jurisdiction in the Early Church: Episcopal and Papal) in the debate on the Venice Statement in the General Synod:

That book deserves careful study, because he again shows how confusion has arisen about terms. He draws attention to a change in the nature of authority after Constantine took over the Church, as one might say. Authority did not remain the authority of a leader of a voluntary society, the Church, and became almost authority in a compulsory society. As he says, 'It is in this way that the whole notion of

specifically Christian authority undergoes a real change in the fourth century from leadership to jurisdiction.' That change in the nature of authority needs to be explored far more carefully than it has been here, because authority needs to be accepted (Proceedings, pp. 360f.).

The Church of England has clearly demonstrated during this debate its willingness to turn to the Bishop of Rome for real Christian leadership; but it has also shown that it is unwilling to accept unqualified papal jurisdiction. The greatest danger on the Roman Catholic side at this particular juncture would, therefore, be a failure to grasp this vital distinction and thereafter to jump immediately to the false conclusion that Anglicans are trying to avoid the rightful claims of Christian authority. On the other hand, there are also some hopeful signs that Roman Catholics are already becoming aware of such dangers.

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 (Cuthbert Rand, p. 194).

On the Anglican side, moreover, an Anglican commentator has already said that: "If Anglicans are asking for the Petrine Office, it is up to Roman Catholics to see that it is the true Petrine Office that we are offered, and not something either emaciated by theological qualification or distorted in its exercise. ...Both at the level of theological exposition and at the level of the way in which the Petrine Office functions, the Venice Statement calls on Roman Catholics to give us the true Petrine Office, in which the Church can once again find and express her unity and speak to the world the saving Word of Christ, with his authority, in an unfragmented way; and this not only on behalf of Anglicans, but of all Christians who genuinely long for the fulfilment of our Lord's prayer that 'all may be one'. (See Faith and Unity, 21 (1977) p. 29.)

Anglicans and Roman Catholics who are now thinking along these lines can no longer be regarded as if they were still ecumenical light-years apart. One could even say that some of them are virtually united already in spirit and in truth. But this still leaves open two vitally important questions. How representative are they of current thinking in their Churches? And will their de facto union be recognized de jure? Doubtless the later stages of the debate on the Venice Statement will provide some clearer answers; but we do not have them at the present moment. After all, this report is only an interim one and the debate is by no means already concluded.

A few short quotations from Canon Pawley's latest assessment of the three ARCIC documents will show, however, that the present Anglican position lies somewhere between that of the Bishop of Kingston and Prof. Lampe, on the one hand, and that of Andrew Louth, on the other. "The first assessment must clearly be of wonder and congratulation that we have come so far in so short a time. ... The statement on the Eucharist, taken by itself, should certainly be sufficient, if accepted officially on sides, to justify considerable advance towards mutual communion. And the second statement, on the Ministry, might have been sufficient ground for us to ask for a

re-examination of *Apostolicae Curae* had it not been for the appearance on the scene, meanwhile, of the ordination of women. ...But we must be under no illusion that the ordination of women is the only stumbling block. We have not yet referred to the agreed statement on Authority in the Church. And here, although it is little short of miraculous that there should have been as much agreement as has been shown, this time there are large gaps which have still to be filled. It is the writer's personal opinion that this report was made too soon and that it leaves too much unsaid. It does not begin to provide a framework on which any practical solution can be built" (p. 47). But he also qualifies his "but-clauses" with a final "but":

But no one can be associated in this debate without being conscious of immense progress in the Spirit already achieved and without being able to hold in reasonable expectation that "He who has begun a good work among us will bring it to completion"(p. 48).

Finally, reference should also be made to two recent articles which have been published in the Netherlands by scholars belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church. Prof. A.J. Bronkhorst's first reaction to the Venice Statement (Kerk en Theologie, 1977, pp. 301-306) is realistic but not entirely optimistic. He has also found a certain vagueness in the text on the subject of primacy (p. 141). Does the statement refer to the kind of primacy now exercised by the Primate of the Anglican Communion or the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch? Or do the Roman Catholic members of the international commission have something quite different in mind? A universal primate such as the one described in the statement could well be attractive given the present decline of Christendom; but the theological objections of the other Churches still stand in the way. Furthermore, it is precisely the theological objections to a Roman primate which have not yet been fully discussed in the international commission. He has also raised the question of whether the tide has turned in the ecumenical movement in such a way that the most that can now be expected is that "each side should recognize the validity of the other's beliefs and practices" (p. 144).

Prof. H. Berkhof of the University of Leiden, on the other hand, has already suggested in several articles that Protestants should now try to look at the Petrine-Office more seriously. In his latest article on this subject (Tenminste, (1977) No. 8, pp. 4-6) he has reiterated his earlier arguments that Peter did indeed exercise a position of leadership in the early Church (see e.g. the Acts of the Apostles). Amongst the Apostles, Peter was primus inter pares; despite his obvious weaknesses. This could perhaps provide the model for a new style of personal and pastoral leadership in the universal church at precisely the world level at which bureaucratic organizations function in the Protestant Churches and in the ecumenical movement.

The question now is whether this combination of personal (i.e. the local minister) and collective (i.e. the local church council) authority which is typical of Protestant congregations at the local level can now be extrapolated to the universal level. (Here it should be noted, however, that Berkhof's use of the term "local" (congregation) is more restricted than the Catholic sense of "the bishop and his diocese".) Such a universal Christian leader could even provide a personal and pastoral - dare I add the word "human"? - counterbalance to the anonymous bureaucracy of (ecumenical) councils at the world level. In this area, furthermore, it would not even be necessary to "start again from scratch":

Why shouldn't the Bishop of Rome, once he has divested himself of his claims to infallibility and his supreme administrative power be precisely the person we are looking for to add power to the elbows

of his brothers and sisters by the exercise of his impartial and (at the same time) pastoral mediation? (p. 6).

This could indeed be possible, writes Berkhof, provided that (a) Roman Catholics do not try to maximalize the Petrine Office; that (b) Protestants do not minimalize it; that (c) the Anglicans and Lutherans do not allow themselves to look at this issue exclusively through traditionalist Roman Catholic spectacles ("Maar het gevaar is groot, dat ze dan teveel aan de traditie van het pausdom te Rome denken", ibid.); and that (d) the Petrine Office is reformed and renewed in the process; in which process the Churches themselves would also be renewed and reformed.

If and when such a chance comes, he avers, Protestants ought to respond to this challenge positively. Furthermore, such a model is also in line with some recent Roman Catholic thinking on this subject (he cites an article by Prof. Haarsma in De Paus van Rome, 1965 and the pseudonymous "Die Vision des Papstes" of 1975 in this particular connexion).

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