

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH: AN ELUCIDATION

1. Comments and Criticisms

After the publication of the Venice Statement on Authority in the Church the Commission received comments and criticisms. Some of the questions raised, such as the request for a clarification of the relation between infallibility and indefectibility, find an answer in the second Statement on Authority. Another question, concerning our understanding of koinonia, is answered in the Introduction, where we show how the concept underlies all our Statements.

Underlying many reactions to the Venice Statement is a degree of uneasiness as to whether insufficient attention is paid to the primary authority of Scripture, with the result that certain historical developments are given an authority comparable to that of Scripture.

~~THE~~ A recurring question has been whether the Commission is suggesting that a universal primacy is a theological necessity simply because one has existed or been claimed.

Some questions have been asked about the status of regional primacies - for example, the patriarchal office as exercised in the Eastern Churches.

Several Questions have also been asked about councils and reception and some commentators have claimed that what the Statement says about the protection of an ecumenical council from error is in conflict with Article XXI of the Anglican Thirty Nine Articles of Religion.

It has been generally suggested that the treatment of the

place and authority of the laity in the Church is inadequate. There have also been requests for a clarification of the nature of Christian authority, ^{and} of jurisdiction, ~~and of the statement that the bishop can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity~~.

In what follows the Commission attempts to address itself to these problems and to elucidate the Venice Statement as it bears on each of them. In seeking to answer the criticisms that have been received we have sometimes thought it necessary to go further and to elucidate the basic issues that underlie them. In all that we say we take for granted two fundamental principles - that Christian faith depends on divine revelation and that the Holy Spirit guides the Church in the communication of revealed truth.

- 1 2. The Place of Scripture
- 2 3. Primacy and History
- 3 4. Regional Primacy
- 4 5. Councils and Reception
- 5 6. The Place of the Laity
- 6 7. Hierarchical Authority
- 7 8. Jurisdiction