

Comments on the ARCIC Statement 'Authority in the Church'

(Sent to an Anglican Bishop by Dr. Kallistos Ware of Oxford in reply to a request for his opinion of the 1976 Venice Statement. The comments may appear more negative than Dr. Ware's intention, since he is 'deeply encouraged by the document which will form a valuable basis for discussion also in the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue.')

I am very sorry for my long delay in replying to your letter of 31 January. I am afraid that I have been entirely overwhelmed by problems here in Oxford; also I did not want to answer your letter without having given some thought to the subject. Let us hope that I am not too late.

From an Orthodox point of view, there is obviously much to welcome in the ARCIC Statement. For brevity I will not mention matters over which as an Orthodox I agree, but I will come at once to my reservations. Like you, I find the Statement sometimes imprecise, both doctrinally and historically.

Setting aside lesser matters, I am disturbed by three omissions:

(i) Very little is said about the Eucharist, apart from a quotation from Acts 2:42 in para. 5. Surely the celebration of the Eucharist is the source and decisive 'model' for all pastoral authority in the Church; yet in fact the dimension of 'Eucharistic ecclesiology' is almost entirely absent from the Statement. Is this a deliberate omission? Of course 'Eucharistic ecclesiology' has its critics, and I would not myself endorse all the conclusions drawn by Fr. Nicolas Afanassieff; but I do agree with the more sober presentation by the Greek theologian John Zizioulas.

(ii) Little if anything is said about the apostolic succession. It is astonishing to find that the word 'apostle' is scarcely ever used in the document. Again, I ask myself whether this omission is deliberate and, if so, what the reason can be (perhaps a desire to escape from the language of past controversies?) While there was of course a development in church order during the first two centuries, and while I would not wish to claim that the bishop is identical with the apostle, yet surely in any discussion of the episcopacy it is vital to emphasize the element of continuity from the apostles. (This was an omission which also disturbed me in the Anglican-Methodist negotiations of the late 1960s.)

(iii) (Here I come to what is perhaps, from the Orthodox viewpoint, the most serious reservation.) Much is said in the Statement about the authority of the local bishop and about the primacy of the Pope of Rome. But the Statement is exceedingly vague about other levels of authority or primacy intermediate between these two. Unless I am mistaken, the terms 'metropolitan', 'autocephalous Church', and above all 'patriarch', are absent from the document. All that we find are imprecise references to 'bishops of prominent sees' (para. 9), 'the bishop of a principal see' (para. 11), 'principal sees' (para. 17), and the like. From an Orthodox standpoint this leaves much to be desired. We regard the Pope as primus inter pares, as the 'elder brother'; but such phrases are of little help unless we specify who the pares or the other 'brethren' may be. For Orthodoxy, these pares or brethren are not just the diocesan bishops in general, but more specifically the other four ancient Patriarchs (who, with the Pope, constituted

the 'Pentarchy' in the earlier Byzantine period) and the heads of the Autocephalous Churches (in the contemporary situation). I am surprised that the Statement did not develop this point, for surely in an eventual reunion scheme with Rome the Anglican communion would wish to claim some kind of 'autocephalous' status?

When I spoke to Bishop Christopher Butler about this lack of reference to intermediate levels of primacy, he told me that this was a misunderstanding, and that the members of the Commission when drafting the document had very definitely kept in view the other types of primacy, seeing the papacy simply as the top of a ladder, as the coping-stone in an elaborately graded hierarchy of authorities. Warmly though I welcome this assurance, I am bound to express regret that the final Statement is not more explicit on this matter.

We Orthodox can accept the affirmation in para. 23, 'The only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such episcopate is the see of Rome' (although I have reservations about the words 'still exercises'.) We can also accept the affirmation in para. 12, 'The see of Rome...eventually became the principal centre in matters concerning the Church universal.' But such assertions are one-sided and even misleading, unless at the same time mention is made of the other forms of primacy, above all that exercised in the East by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Isolated and taken out of context, Roman Primacy becomes the kind of supremacy that the Christian East has never accepted. For us Orthodox the indispensable 'context' of Roman Primacy is the Byzantine system of the 'Pentarchy' and the present-day system of Autocephalous Churches. I hope that future ARCIC statements can deal more fully with this aspect.

Kallistos Ware

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