

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 09.01 HOURS 20TH JANUARY 1977.

STATEMENT FOR THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON 18TH JANUARY 1977  
by THE BISHOP OF OSSORY (CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE ANGLICAN/ROMAN  
CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION)

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I should like, first of all, to commend the Statement to the members of both our Churches, and indeed, to other Christians also, as does the last paragraph of the Preface.

If one looks at the opening paragraphs of the Preface and at the conclusion, (26) of the Statement itself, something important declares itself at once, namely, the context of the Statement and, for that matter, of ARCIC's work as a whole.

What is that context? It is the gradual restoration of the communion of sister-churches: 'We are convinced, therefore, that our degree of agreement, which argues for greater communion between our churches, can make a profound contribution to the witness of Christianity in our contemporary society' (Preface).

This, in turn, reflects the theme of the Malta Report of the Joint Preparatory Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission which was drawn up in 1968 and was received and accepted both by the Lambeth Conference of that year and by the Vatican Secretariat for Unity.

The connection between this context and the Commission's work is brought out clearly not only at the beginning of the Preface but in the final paragraph (26) of the Statement which reads: 'The Malta Report of 1968 envisaged the coming together of the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Anglican Communion in terms of "unity by stages". We have reached agreement on the doctrines of the Eucharist, Ministry, and apart from the qualifications of para. 24, Authority. Doctrinal agreements reached by theological commissions cannot, however, by themselves achieve the goal of Christian unity. Accordingly, we submit our statements to our respective authorities to consider whether or not they are judged to express on these central subjects a unity at the level of faith which not only justifies but requires action to bring about a closer sharing between our two communions in life, worship and mission'.

It is within this context that the Statement should be read, for the context illuminates the text. It is worth noting too that the same concept of the restoration of the communion of sister-churches provides the perspective for the present

development of relations between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches - a situation in which similar problems of authority in the Church arise.

This is the perspective for the document and for the agreement reached in the Statement. One might compare in passing the findings of the American Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue on primacy in the universal church, though the two documents are independent of one another and use different methods.

The first and fundamental matter on which agreement is recorded is that of the nature and purpose of authority in the Church. Authority in the Christian Church derives from Christ and the chief purpose of the authority-process is to maintain the Church in 'the truth of the Gospel'. The Statement agrees on the primary role of the Scriptural criterion in this process.

The references are: 'assisted by the Holy Spirit they transmitted what they had heard and seen of the life and words of Jesus and their interpretation of his redemptive work. Consequently the inspired documents in which this is related came to be accepted by the Church as a normative record of the authentic foundation of the faith... To these the Church refers its teaching and practice. Through these written words the authority of the Word of God is conveyed. Entrusted with these documents, the Christian community is enabled by the Holy Spirit to live out the gospel and so to be led into all truth'. (2). Referring to 'the formulation of creeds, conciliar definitions, and other statements of belief' (14), the Statement notes that 'All such restatement must be consonant with the apostolic witness recorded in the Scriptures; for in this witness the preaching and teaching of ministers, and statements of local and universal councils, have to find their ground and consistency'. (15) Again, 'In times of crisis or when fundamental matters of faith are in question, the Church can make judgements, consonant with Scripture, which are authoritative' (19).

The Statement also stresses that the appeal to Scripture and to the primitive Church is 'basic and normative', and notes that this is a characteristic of the Anglican tradition (19, and footnote). For their part, Anglicans will agree that all this is thoroughly consistent with their traditional understanding of the authority process.

This leads into a further emphasis in the Statement, namely, that 'primacy and conciliarity are complementary' (22). The Roman Catholic Church has emphasised primacy while the Churches of the Anglican Communion have developed forms of conciliarity in conjunction with the office of primacy.

The Statement then goes on to underline the essential complementarity of these two modes of authority's exercise (22) and the need for this complementary pattern to be realised at the universal level, if the separated Churches are to come together:

...This general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of episcopate serving the koinonia of the churches needs to be realised at the universal level' (23).

The second last paragraph of the Preface indicates that this degree of restoration of communion would be a learning situation for both Churches in 'humility and charity'.

The Statement then asserts that, in such a reunited Church, it would be appropriate for the historical reasons given (23) that such a universal primacy within the primatial - conciliar pattern should appropriately be the Roman primacy: 'It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see' (23).

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Members of both Churches reading the document will feel, we hope, that full justice has been done to both traditions.

It would perhaps be 'appropriate' therefore, if having commended the Statement to members of both Churches, one were to attempt to comment on certain points which are likely to concern Anglicans in particular.

The Statement says: 'What we have written here amounts to a consensus on authority in the Church and, in particular, on the basic principles of primacy. This consensus is of fundamental importance. While it does not wholly resolve all the problems associated with papal primacy, it provides us with a solid basis for confronting them' (24).

That this is a fair claim can be seen by examining the document itself, and in commending it to Anglicans it is worth pointing out that the document grew by its own momentum in the work of the Commission and not by means of a sort of bargaining process.

For example, what the Statement has to say on episcopacy and the role of primates in the context of collegiality will be found, although this is quite fortuitous, to be very much in tune with the proceedings of the Lambeth Conference of 1968 (which appointed the Anglican representatives on ARCIC). The report to Lambeth 1968 on 'Episcopacy, Collegiality, Papacy' (Report, pp. 137-8) should be compared with the ARCIC Statement, paras. 9-11, 16, 19-22.

Anglicans will note that the Statement, as it considers the question of papal primacy, does so from the angle of historical development: 'It is within the context of this historical development that the see of Rome, whose prominence was associated with the death there of Peter and Paul, eventually became the principal centre in matters concerning the Church universal' (12). One may compare with this the sentence in the Lambeth Report (1968) which reads: 'We recognise the Papacy as a historic reality whose developing role requires deep reflection and joint study by all concerned for the unity of the whole Body of Christ'.

Because of their knowledge of the development in history and because primacy has always been part and parcel of the principles and practice in every Anglican Province, Anglicans have not been hostile in the past to the concept of a universal primacy. The proviso, on historical and theological grounds, was that such a primate was a primus inter pares, who might serve as a centre of unity. This is but an extension of Anglican practice which sees the Primacy of Canterbury, in the words of Lambeth 1968, as involving 'in a particular way, the care of all the Churches which is shared by all the bishops'.

Anglicans were quite content in the past to concede a simple primacy of order, responsibility or service to the Roman see on historical grounds. What they rejected was that this primacy was of divine right, essential to the being of a true Church, and possessed of immediate and universal jurisdiction. Great names in Anglican history agree in this - names such as Richard Field, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop John Cosin, Archbishop Laud of Canterbury who wrote: 'A primacy of order was never denied him by the Protestants; and an universal supremacy of power was never granted him by the primitive christians'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Conference with Fisher (1639), Sect. XX.

One of the most distinguished men of the seventeenth century, the Irish primate Bramhall, saw such a primacy of order within a firmly collegial context as being a hopeful possibility for the unity of all Christians. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Archbishop Wake of Canterbury, whose ecumenism reached out both to Rome and to the Continental Reformed, said the same thing. He was echoed in the following century by such as Bishop Mandell Creighton, the historian, and by Archbishop Maclagan of York, and more recently, by Archbishop Ramsey of Canterbury. Lambeth Conferences from 1908 to 1968 have refused to close the door here.

This leads into what is not agreed in the Statement on this aspect of authority. The Preface says 'Our consensus covers a very wide area; though we have not been able to resolve some of the difficulties of Anglicans concerning Roman Catholic belief relating to the office of the Bishop of Rome, we hope and trust that our analysis has placed these problems in a proper perspective'. The difficulties mentioned are enumerated in the text of the Statement (24). These are, the commonly understood teaching on the infallibility and immediate and universal jurisdiction of the Pope, which Lambeth 1968 found unacceptable; the traditional exegesis of the Petrine texts and the use of 'divine right' language in respect of papal primacy. The Marian dogmas are listed as constituting an exercise of papal authority which created grave difficulties for Anglicans.

What then is the achievement of the Statement? In the first place, it records a large measure of significant agreement on the nature, exercise and implications of authority in the Church, and this by a mixed Commission of Anglicans and Roman Catholics: 'What we have written here amounts to a consensus on authority in the church and, in particular on the basic principles of primacy. This consensus is of fundamental importance. While it does not wholly resolve all the problems associated with papal primacy, it provides us with a solid basis for confronting them' (24).

In the second place, the Statement has achieved a certain demythologising of difficulties felt on either side: 'In our three Agreed Statements we have endeavoured to get behind the opposed and entrenched positions of past controversies. We have tried to re-assess what are the real issues to be resolved... For the future relations between our churches the doctrinal

convergence which we have experienced offers hope that the remaining difficulties can be resolved'. (25)

In the third place, there is the frank insistence that, if the consensus be accepted, a beneficial learning situation involving changes for the Roman Catholic Church as well as for the Churches of the Anglican Communion would inevitably result. It would be a situation, as the Preface spells out, in which each Church would be enriched by the insights of the other - 'The prospect should be met with faith, not fear'.

Lastly, the Statement achieves a clear conclusion which it formally submits to the respective authorities in both Churches. The Statement asserts that the convergence reached 'argues for greater communion between our churches' (Preface) and asks if the degree of agreement achieved 'not only justifies but requires action to bring about a closer sharing between our two Communion in life, worship and mission' (26). The area of agreement in faith as outlined in the Malta Report (7) is large and to it the Agreement Statements have added agreements on the three areas specified in that Report, (22), namely, 'the question of intercommunion, and the related matters of Church and Ministry', and 'the question of authority, its nature, exercise and implications'. The concluding lines of the Statement imply a question 'to our respective authorities', and through them to the Churches, - Over against all this, are the remaining differences to keep them separated indefinitely or has the time arrived for initiating officially a degree of greater communion between the Churches?