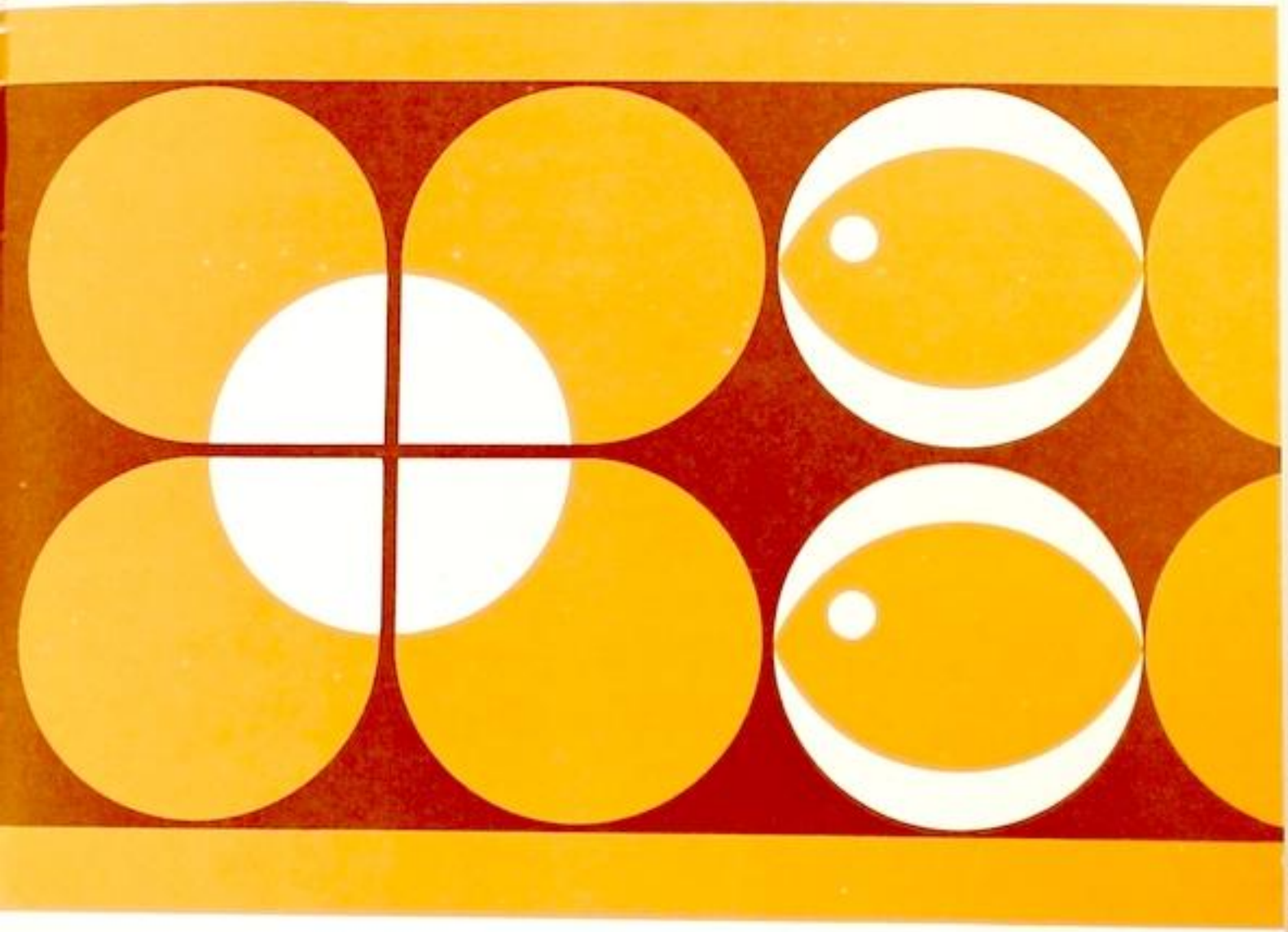
AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH



The Statement of Authority in the Church agreed by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, Venice 1976.

The official text, together with an introduction by Bishop Christopher Butler and a commentary by Rev David Miles Board based on conversations with Bishop Alan Clark, Co-Chairman of the Commission.

INTRODUCTION

In the palmy days of inter-Christian controversy the Anglican description of Roman Catholics was Papists, and the Catholic description of Anglicans was Protestants. Behind both descriptions lay the concept of authority. It is a sign of the times that an agreed statement on authority is now published over the names of the Anglican and Roman Catholic members of a commission set up by the Pope and by Dr. Ramsey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, and his metropolitan colleagues. What follows is a personal appreciation by a Roman Catholic member of the commission. Other members would no doubt express themselves differently.

The commission is not a self-appointed group of ecumenical enthusiasts. It is an official commission, but with no power to commit the churches to any decisions whatever. The statement is a report to the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who have permitted its publication.

In this country it will be too easy to imagine that the commission represents merely English Catholicism on the one hand and the Church of England on the other. This is not so. Both our churches are international and world-wide. The commission owes its existence and acknowledges its responsibility to these two world-wide Christian bodies. Its Anglican members were chosen from England, the U.S.A., Canada, South Africa, Australia and Ireland. Similarly, its Catholic members are from various parts of the world.

The statement needs to be read carefully. It is not an orderly systematic listing of a few general principles with deductions from them. It is more like an essay in history and an evaluation of the lessons of history. Newman would have understood its method, for he wrote: "Christianity has been long enough in the world to justify us in dealing with it as a fact in the world's history". Hence the statement does not "prove" its conclusions either by appeal to Scripture (though it maintains that Scripture can be appealed to as a criterion) or by recital of dogmatic decisions of Ecumenical Councils and Popes (though it has something to say about such decisions).

Does it reach any conclusions at all? With reservations, it does. It turns to Christian history, the unfolding objective facts of that guidance of the Church by the Holy Spirit of which the commission members, on behalf of their respective churches, were convinced. It sets out, soberly and almost casually, the broad outlines of a majestic historical process in which the Christian religion, sprung from the life and teaching, the death and resurrection of its Founder, developed into a world-force and captured the centre of the Mediterranean stage in five centuries of growth and argument. It concentrates on institutional developments. It shows how the common purpose of Christians, their

common faith and their sense that real "community" was part of their divine mandate, led to the emergence of regional councils and then of world-wide or "ecumenical" councils, and correlatively to the recognition of primatial authority vested in archbishops, metropolitans and patriarchs and, at universal level, of a Roman primacy.

The commission was well aware that the authority of these councils and these "primates" operated not only in the field of discipline but also in the official formulation of doctrine. And it acknowledges that that discipline and the process of formulation are both necessary for the life of the Church. It further agrees that "when the Church meets in (genuine) ecumenical council its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous" — a rather Oxbridge way of saying, I think, that such decisions are certainly true. It admits that they are formulated in language that is historically conditioned and may therefore invite subsequent restatement; but "restatement always builds upon, and does not contradict, the truth intended by the definition".

Still more, the statement regards "primacy and conciliarity" as complementary, and holds that undue emphasis on either may lead to serious imbalance. It affirms that both conciliarity and the primatial element need to be realised at "the universal level". And having made the rather obvious observation that "the only see which makes any claim to universal primacy . . . is the see of Rome", it concludes its main line of argumentation with the quiet but momentous remark: "It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see". If there is much here for Anglicans to ponder, there is something also for Catholics: the Roman primacy *needs* the balancing factor of "conciliarity" (Catholics mean the same thing when they speak of episcopal "collegiality"); without it, the Christian institution is in a condition of imbalance, is distorted.

Now for the reservations. In a penultimate paragraph the commission has thought it right to list problems arising from "particular claims" of papal primacy and from its exercise. These problems are familiar to those acquainted with the historical controversy between our two communions: the "infallibility" attributed to some papal teaching, the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the "universal immediate jurisdiction" of the Pope, and so on. Does the enumeration of these problems amount to an erosion of the agreement previously affirmed?

My personal view is that it does not. The agreement is broad, categoric and massive. The problems are restricted in their range and the commission itself hopes that, presumably within the horizon of the broad agreement, remaining difficulties can be resolved. It had neither time nor competence nor will to resolve them on the spot. They should perhaps be referred to a number of special groups of theologians. I think that the statement has put forward conditions for a future union that are not only based on objective historical fact but are also probably the real but only set of conditions for a future and (let us hope) not too far distant union, which need not be limited to our two churches.

One final word. Nowhere does the statement suggest that the Church of England should be "absorbed" into the system of the English Roman Catholic Church. We have found room for a Ukrainian Catholic Church in England alongside that of "Westminster". There is no reason why Westminster and Lambeth should not co-exist, in full mutual communion but with their separate autonomies, under the "universal primacy" of a successor of St Peter.

+ CHRISTOPHER BUTLER
Bishop in Hertfordshire
Member of the International Commission

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The Status of the Document

The document published here is the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. It presupposes the Commission's agreed statement on Eucharistic Doctrine (1971) and Ministry and Ordination (1973).

It is at present no more than a joint statement of the Commission on the final item in its programme of work. The authorities who appointed the Commission have allowed the statement to be published so that it may be discussed by other theologians. It is not a declaration by the Roman Catholic Church or by the Anglican Communion. It does not authorize any change in existing ecclesiastical discipline.

The Commission will be glad to receive observations and criticisms made in a constructive and fraternal spirit. Its work is done in the service of the Church. It will give responsible attention to every serious comment which is likely to help in improving or completing the result so far achieved. This wider collaboration will make its work to a greater degree work in common, and by God's grace will lead us to the goal set at the beginning of Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue: 'that unity in truth for which Christ prayed' (Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, March 1966).

Comments on the statement or requests for further information on the work of the Commission may be sent to its Secretaries:

— The Reverend Christopher Hill, The Archbishop of Canterbury's Counsellors on Foreign Relations, Palace Court, 222 Lambeth Road, London SE1 7LB (Tel.: 01-928 4880).

— The Rt Reverend Mgr William Purdy, Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican City, 00193, Rome, Italy (Tel.: Rome 698-4533).

All quotations from the Second Vatican Council are taken from the edition of Vatican II Documents edited by Austin Flannery OP and published by Costello.

Preface

The Malta Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission (1968) outlined the large measure of agreement in faith with exists between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Anglican Communion (para. 7). It then went on to note three specific areas of doctrinal disagreement. These were listed in the Report as matters for joint investigation. Accordingly the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, proposed by the Report, was recommended to examine jointly 'the question of intercommunion, and the related matters of Church and Ministry', and 'the question of authority, its nature, exercise, and implications'.

To our previous Agreed Statements on the Eucharist (Windsor 1971) and Ministry (Canterbury 1973) we now add an Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church (Venice 1976). The Commission thus submits its work to the authorities who appointed it and, with their permission, offers it to our churches.

The question of authority in the Church has long been recognized as crucial to the growth in unity of the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Anglican Communion. It was precisely in the problem of papal primacy that our historical divisions found their unhappy origin. Hence, however significant our consensus on the doctrine of the Eucharist and of the Ministry, unresolved questions on the nature and exercise of Authority in the Church would hinder the growing experience of unity which is the pattern of our present relations.

The present Statement has, we believe, made a significant contribution to the resolution of these questions. 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.

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.

The consensus we have reached, if it is to be accepted by our two communities, would have, we insist, important consequences. Common recognition of Roman primacy would bring changes not only to the Anglican Communion but also to the Roman Catholic Church. On both sides the readiness to learn, necessary to the achievement of such a wider *koinonia,* would demand humility and charity. The prospect should be met with faith, not fear. Communion with the see of Rome would bring to the churches of the Anglican Communion not only a

wider *koinonia* but also a strengthening of the power to realize its traditional ideal of diversity in unity. Roman Catholics, on their side, would be enriched by the presence of a particular tradition of spirituality and scholarship, the lack of which has deprived the Roman Catholic Church of a precious element in the Christian heritage. The Roman Catholic Church has much to learn from the Anglican synodical tradition of involving the laity in the life and mission of the Church. 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.

It is in this light that we would wish to submit our conclusions to our respective authorities, believing that our work, indebted, as it is, to many sources outside the Commission as well as to its own labours, will be of service not only to ourselves but to Christians of other traditions in our common quest for the unity of Christ's Church.

H.R. McADOO, *Bishop of Ossory*

ALAN C. CLARK, *Bishop of East Anglia*

CO-CHAIRMEN

Authority in the Church

The Statement

INTRODUCTION

1. The confession of Christ as Lord is the heart of the Christian faith. To him God has given all authority in heaven and on earth. As Lord of the Church he bestows the Holy Spirit to create a communion of men with God and with one another. To bring this *koinonia* to perfection is God's eternal purpose. The Church exists to serve the fulfilment of this purpose when God will be all in all.

I CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY

2. Through the gift of the Spirit the apostolic community came to recognize in the words and deeds of Jesus the saving activity of God and their mission to proclaim to all men the good news of salvation. Therefore they preached Jesus through whom God has spoken finally to men. 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 has recourse for the inspiration of its life and mission; 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. It is therefore given the capacity to assess its faith and life and to speak to the world in the name of Christ. Shared commitment and belief create a common mind in determining how the gospel should be interpreted and obeyed. By reference to this common faith each person tests the truth of his own belief.

3. 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 their mission in the world. By this action of the Holy Spirit the authority of the Lord is active in the Church. Through incorporation into Christ and obedience to him Christians are made open to one another and assume mutual obligations. Since the Lordship of Christ is universal, the community also bears a responsibility towards all mankind, which demands participation in all that promotes the good of society and responsiveness to every form of human need. The common life in the body of Christ equips the community and each of its members with what they need to fulfil this responsibility: they are enabled so to live that the authority of Christ will be mediated through them. This is Christian authority: when Christians so act and speak, men perceive the authoritative word of Christ.

II AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

4. The Church is a community which consciously seeks to submit to Jesus Christ. By sharing in the life of the Spirit all find within the *koinonia* the means to be faithful to the revelation of their Lord. Some respond more fully to his call; by the inner quality of their life they win a respect which allows them to speak in Christ's name with authority.

5. The Holy Spirit also gives to some individuals and communities special gifts for the benefit of the Church, which entitle them to speak and be heeded (e.g. Eph. 4.11, 12; 1 Cor. 12.4-11).

Among these gifts of the Spirit for the edification of the Church is the *episcope* of the ordained ministry. There are some whom the Holy Spirit commissions through ordination for service to the whole community. They exercise their authority in fulfilling ministerial functions related to 'the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2.42). This pastoral authority belongs primarily to the bishop, who is responsible for preserving and promoting the integrity of the *koinonia* in order to further the Church's response to the Lordship of Christ and its commitment to mission. Since the bishop has general oversight of the community, he can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its daily life. He does not, however, act alone. All those who have ministerial authority must recognize their mutual responsibility and interdependence. This service of the Church, officially entrusted only to ordained ministers, is intrinsic to the Church's structure according to the mandate given by Christ and recognized by the community. This is yet another form of authority.

6. The perception of God's will for his Church does not belong only to the ordained ministry but is shared by all its members. All who live faithfully within the *koinonia* may become sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and be brought towards a deeper understanding of the gospel and of its implications in diverse cultures and changing situations. Ordained ministers commissioned to discern these insights and give authoritative expression to them, are part of the community, sharing its quest for understanding the gospel in obedience to Christ and receptive to the needs and concerns of all.

The community, for its part, must respond to and assess the insights and teachings of the ordained ministers. Through this continuing process of discernment and response, in which the faith is expressed and the gospel is pastorally applied, the Holy Spirit declares the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the faithful may live freely under the discipline of the gospel.

7. It is by such means as these that the Holy Spirit keeps the Church under the Lordship of Christ, who, taking full account of human weakness, has promised never to abandon his people. 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.

III AUTHORITY IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCHES

8. The *koinonia* is realized not only in the local Christian communities, but also in the communion of these communities with one another. The unity of local communities under one bishop constitutes what is commonly meant in our two communions by 'a local church', though the expression is sometimes used in other ways. Each local church is rooted in the witness of the apostles and entrusted with the apostolic mission. Faithful to the gospel, celebrating the one eucharist and dedicated to the service of the same Lord, it is the Church of Christ. In spite of diversities each local church recognizes its own essential features in the others and its true identity with them. The authoritative action and proclamation of the people of God to the world therefore are not simply the responsibilities of each church acting separately, but of all the local churches together. The spiritual gifts of one may be an inspiration to the others. Since each bishop must ensure that the local community is distinctively Christian he has to make it aware of the universal communion of which it is part. The bishop expresses this unity of his church with the others: this is symbolized by the participation of several bishops in his ordination.

9. Ever since the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) the churches have realized the need to express and strengthen the *koinonia* by coming together to discuss matters of mutual concern and to meet contemporary challenges. Such gatherings may be either regional or worldwide. Through such meetings the Church, determined to be obedient to Christ and faithful to its vocation, formulates its rule of faith and orders its life. In all these councils, whether of bishops only, or of bishops, clergy, and laity, decisions are authoritative when they express the common faith and mind of the Church. The decisions of what has traditionally been called an 'ecumenical council' are binding upon the whole Church; those of a regional council or synod bind only the churches it represents. Such decrees are to be received by the local churches as expressing the mind of the Church. This exercise of authority, far from being an imposition, is designed to strengthen the life and mission of the local churches and of their members.

10. Early in the history of the Church a function of oversight of the other bishops of their regions was assigned to bishops of prominent sees. Concern to keep the churches faithful to the will of Christ was among the considerations which contributed to this development. This practice has continued to the present day. This form of *episcope* is a service to the Church carried out in co-responsibility with all the bishops of the region; for every bishop receives at ordination both responsibility for his local church and the obligation to maintain it in living awareness and practical service of the other churches. The Church of God is found in each of them and in their *koinonia*.

11. The purpose of *koinonia* is the realization of the will of Christ: 'Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one . . . so that the world may believe that

thou hast sent me' (John 17.11, 21, rsv). The bishop of a principal see should seek the fulfilment of this will of Christ in the churches of his region. It is his duty to assist the bishops to promote in their churches right teaching, holiness of life, brotherly unity, and the Church's mission to the world. When he perceives a serious deficiency in the life or mission of one of the churches he is bound, if necessary, to call the local bishop's attention to it and to offer assistance. There will also be occasions when he has to assist other bishops to reach a common mind with regard to their shared needs and difficulties. Sharing together and active mutual concern are indispensable to the churches' effective witness to Christ.

12. 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.

The importance of the bishop of Rome among his brother bishops, as explained by analogy with the position of Peter among the apostles, was interpreted as Christ's will for his Church.

On the basis of this analogy the First Vatican Council affirmed that this service was necessary to the unity of the whole Church. Far from overriding the authority of the bishops in their own diocese, this service was explicitly intended to support them in their ministry of oversight. The Second Vatican Council placed this service in the wider context of the shared responsibility of all the bishops. The teaching of these councils shows that communion with the bishop of Rome does not imply submission to an authority which would stifle the distinctive features of the local churches. The purpose of this episcopal function of the bishop of Rome is to promote Christian fellowship in faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles.

The theological interpretation of this primacy and the administrative structures through which it has been exercised have varied considerably through the centuries. Neither theory nor practice, however, has ever fully reflected these ideals. Sometimes functions assumed by the see of Rome were not necessarily linked to the primacy: sometimes the conduct of the occupant of this see has been unworthy of his office: sometimes the image of this office has been obscured by interpretations placed upon it: and sometimes external pressures have made its proper exercise almost impossible. Yet the primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his oversight in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and one another. Communion with him is intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church, and as a sign of the communion of all the churches.

IV AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF FAITH

13. A local church cannot be truly faithful to Christ if it does not desire to foster universal communion, the embodiment of that unity for which Christ prayed. This communion is founded on faith in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, crucified, risen, ascended, and now

living through his Spirit in the Church. Every local church must therefore ever seek a deeper understanding and clearer expression of this common faith, both of which are threatened when churches are isolated by division.

14. The Church's purpose in its proclamation is to lead mankind to accept God's saving work in Christ, an acceptance which not only requires intellectual assent but also demands the response of the whole person. In order to clarify and transmit what is believed and to build up and safeguard the Christian life, the Church has found the formulation of creeds, conciliar definitions, and other statements of belief indispensable. But these are always instrumental to the truth which they are intended to convey.

15. The Church's life and work are shaped by its historical origins, by its subsequent experience, and by its endeavour to make the relevance of the gospel plain to every generation. Through reflection upon the word, through the proclamation of the gospel, through baptism, through worship, especially the eucharist, the people of God are moved to the living remembrance of Jesus Christ and of the experience and witness of the apostolic community. This remembrance supports and guides them in their search for language which will effectively communicate the meaning of the gospel.

All generations and cultures must be helped to understand that the good news of salvation is also for them. 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. 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. Although these clarifications are conditioned by the circumstances which prompted them, some of their perceptions may be of lasting value. In this process the Church itself may come to see more clearly the implications of the gospel. This is why the Church has endorsed certain formulas as authentic expressions of its witness, whose significance transcends the setting in which they were first formulated. This is not to claim that these formulas are the only possible, or even the most exact, way of expressing the faith, or that they can never be improved. Even when a doctrinal definition is regarded by the Christian community as part of its permanent teaching, this does not exclude subsequent restatement. Although the categories of thought and the mode of expression may be superseded, restatement always builds upon, and does not contradict, the truth intended by the original definition.

16. Local councils held from the second century determined the limits of the New Testament, and gave to the Church a canon which has remained normative. The action of a council in making such a decision on so momentous a matter implies an assurance that the Lord himself

is present when his people assemble in his name (Matt. 18.20), and that a council may say, 'it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (Acts 15.28). The conciliar mode of authority exercised in the matter of the canon has also been applied to questions of discipline and of fundamental doctrine. When decisions (as at Nicaea in 325) affect the entire Church and deal with controverted matters which have been widely and seriously debated, it is important to establish criteria for the recognition and reception of conciliar definitions and disciplinary decisions. A substantial part in the process of reception is played by the subject matter of the definitions and by the response of the faithful. This process is often gradual, as the decisions come to be seen in perspective through the Spirit's continuing guidance of the whole Church.

17. Among the complex historical factors which contributed to the recognition of conciliar decisions considerable weight attached to their confirmation by the principal sees, and in particular by the see of Rome. At an early period other local churches actively sought the support and approbation of the church in Rome; and in course of time the agreement of the Roman see was regarded as necessary to the general acceptance of synodal decisions in major matters of more than regional concern, and also, eventually, to their canonical validity. By their agreement or disagreement the local church of Rome and its bishop fulfilled their responsibility towards other local churches and their bishops for maintaining the whole Church in the truth. In addition the bishop of Rome was also led to intervene in controversies relating to matters of faith — in most cases in response to appeals made to him, but sometimes on his own initiative.

18. In its mission to proclaim and safeguard the gospel the Church has the obligation and the competence to make declarations in matters of faith. This mission involves the whole people of God, among whom some may rediscover or perceive more clearly than others certain aspects of the saving truth. At times there results conflict and debate. Customs, accepted positions, beliefs, formulations, and practices as well as innovations and re-interpretations, may be shown to be inadequate, mistaken, or even inconsistent with the gospel. When conflict endangers unity or threatens to distort the gospel the Church must have effective means for resolving it.

In both our traditions the appeal to Scripture, to the creeds, to the Fathers, and to the definitions of the councils of the early Church is regarded as basic and normative.* But the bishops have a special responsibility for promoting truth and discerning error, and the interaction of bishop and people in its exercise is a safeguard of Christian life and fidelity. The teaching of the faith and the ordering of life in the Christian community require a daily exercise of this responsibility; but there is no guarantee that those who have an everyday responsibility

* This is emphasized in the Anglican tradition. Cf. the Lambeth Conferences of 1948 and 1968.

will — any more than other members — invariably be free from errors of judgement, will never tolerate abuses, and will never distort the truth. Yet, in Christian hope, we are confident that such failures cannot destroy the Church's ability to proclaim the gospel and to show forth the Christian life; for we believe that Christ will not desert his Church and that the Holy Spirit will lead it into all truth. That is why the Church, in spite of its failures, can be described as indefectible.

V CONCILIAR AND PRIMATIAL AUTHORITY

19. In times of crisis or when fundamental matters of faith are in question, the Church can make judgements, consonant with Scripture, which are authoritative. When the Church meets in ecumenical council its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous. Through the Holy Spirit the Church commits itself to these judgements, recognizing that, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with Tradition, they are by the same Spirit protected from error. They do not add to the truth but, although not exhaustive, they clarify the Church's understanding of it. In discharging this responsibility bishops share in a special gift of Christ to his Church. Whatever further clarification or interpretation may be propounded by the Church, the truth expressed will always be confessed. This binding authority does not belong to every conciliar decree, but only to those which formulate the central truths of salvation. This authority is ascribed in both our traditions to decisions of the ecumenical councils of the first centuries.*

20. The bishops are collectively responsible for defending and interpreting the apostolic faith. The primacy accorded to a bishop implies that, after consulting his fellow bishops, he may speak in their name and express their mind. The recognition of his position by the faithful creates an expectation that on occasion he will take an initiative in speaking for the Church. Primatial statements are only one way by which the Holy Spirit keeps the people of God faithful to the truth of the gospel.

21. If primacy is to be a genuine expression of *episcope* it will foster the *koinonia* by helping the bishops in their task of apostolic leadership both in their local church and in the Church universal. Primacy fulfils its purpose by helping the churches to listen to one another, to grow in love and unity, and to strive together towards the fullness of Christian life and witness; it respects and promotes Christian freedom and spontaneity; it does not seek uniformity where diversity is legitimate, or centralize administration to the detriment of local churches.

A primate exercises his ministry not in isolation but in collegial association with his brother bishops. His intervention in the affairs of a local church should not be made in such a way as to usurp the responsibility of its bishop.

* Since our historical divisions, the Roman Catholic Church has continued the practice of holding general councils of its bishops, some of which it has designated as ecumenical. The churches of the Anglican Communion have developed other forms of conciliarity.

22. Although primacy and conciliarity are complementary elements of *episcope* it has often happened that one has been emphasized at the expense of the other, even to the point of serious imbalance. When churches have been separated from one another, this danger has been increased. The *koinonia* of the churches requires that a proper balance be preserved between the two with the responsible participation of the whole people of God.

23. If God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, this general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episcope* serving the *koinonia* of the churches needs to be realized at the universal level. The only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such *episcope* is the see of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died.

It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see.

VI PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

24. 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. It is when we move from these basic principles to particular claims of papal primacy and to its exercise that problems arise, the gravity of which will be variously judged:

(*a*) Claims on behalf of the Roman see as commonly presented in the past have put a greater weight on the Petrine texts (Matt. 16.18, 19; Luke 22.31, 32; John 21.15-17) than they are generally thought to be able to bear. However, many Roman Catholic scholars do not now feel it necessary to stand by former exegesis of these texts in every respect.

(*b*) The First Vatican Council of 1870 uses the language of 'divine right' of the successors of Peter. This language has no clear interpretation in modern Roman Catholic theology. If it is understood as affirming that the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome is part of God's design for the universal *koinonia* then it need not be a matter of disagreement. But if it were further implied that as long as a church is not in communion with the bishop of Rome, it is regarded by the Roman Catholic Church as less than fully a church, a difficulty would remain: for some this difficulty would be removed by simply restoring communion, but to others the implication would itself be an obstacle to entering into communion with Rome.

(*c*) Anglicans find grave difficulty in the affirmation that the pope can be infallible in his teaching. It must, however, be borne in mind that the doctrine of infallibility* is hedged round by very rigorous

* 'Infallibility' is a technical term which does not bear precisely the same meaning as the word does in common usage. Its theological sense is seen in paras. 15 and 19 above.

conditions laid down at the First Vatican Council. These conditions preclude the idea that the pope is an inspired oracle communicating fresh revelation, or that he can speak independently of his fellow bishops and the Church, or on matters not concerning faith or morals. For the Roman Catholic Church the pope's dogmatic definitions, which, fulfilling the criteria of infallibility, are preserved from error, do no more but no less than express the mind of the Church on issues concerning the divine revelation. Even so, special difficulties are created by the recent Marian dogmas, because Anglicans doubt the appropriateness, or even the possibility, of defining them as essential to the faith of believers.

(*d*) The claim that the pope possesses universal immediate jurisdiction, the limits of which are not clearly specified, is a source of anxiety to Anglicans who fear that the way is thus open to its illegitimate or uncontrolled use. Nevertheless, the First Vatican Council intended that the papal primacy should be exercised only to maintain and never to erode the structures of the local churches. The Roman Catholic Church is today seeking to replace the juridical outlook of the nineteenth century by a more pastoral understanding of authority in the Church.

25. In spite of the difficulties just mentioned, we believe that this Statement on Authority in the Church represents a significant convergence with far-reaching consequences. For a considerable period theologians in our two traditions, without compromising their respective allegiances, have worked on common problems with the same methods. In the process they have come to see old problems in new horizons and have experienced a theological convergence which has often taken them by surprise.

In our three Agreed Statements we have endeavoured to get behind the opposed and entrenched positions of past controversies. We have tried to reassess what are the real issues to be resolved. We have often deliberately avoided the vocabulary of past polemics, not with any intention of evading the real difficulties that provoked them, but because the emotive associations of such language have often obscured the truth. For the future relations between our churches the doctrinal convergence which we have experienced offers hope that remaining difficulties can be resolved.

CONCLUSION

26. 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 agreements 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.

Members of the Commission

ANGLICAN DELEGATES

The Rt Revd H. R. McAdoo, Bishop of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin (Co-Chairman).

The Most Revd F. R. Arnott, Archbishop of Brisbane.

The Rt Revd J. R. H. Moorman (formerly Bishop of Ripon).

The Rt Revd E. G. Knapp-Fisher, Archdeacon of Westminster (formerly Bishop of Pretoria).

The Rt Revd A. A. Vogel, Bishop of West Missouri.

The Very Revd Henry Chadwick, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford.

The Revd J. W. Charley, Rector, St Peter's, Everton, and Warden of Shrewsbury House.

The Revd Dr Eugene Fairweather, Keble Professor of Divinity, Trinity College, University of Toronto.

The Revd Canon H. E. Root, Professor of Theology, University of Southampton.

CONSULTANT

The Revd Canon R. J. Halliburton, Principal, Chichester Theological College *(not present at the 1976 meeting).*

SECRETARY

The Revd Christopher Hill, Assistant Chaplain, Archbishop of Canterbury's Counsellors on Foreign Relations.

ROMAN CATHOLIC DELEGATES

The Rt Revd Alan C. Clark, Bishop of East Anglia (Co-Chairman).

The Rt Revd Christopher Butler, OSB, Bishop in Hertfordshire.

The Revd Fr Barnabas Ahern, CP, Professor of Sacred Scripture, Rome.

The Revd Fr P. Duprey, WF, Under Secretary, Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The Revd Dr Herbert Ryan, SJ, Professor of Religious Studies, Loyola University, Los Angeles.

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WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OBSERVER

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A GUIDE TO THE AGREED STATEMENT: AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

1. THE DEBATE ABOUT AUTHORITY

AGREED STATEMENTS AND THEIR STATUS

"Authority in the Church" is the third agreed statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. The first two (on the Eucharist, and on Ministry and Ordination) have been widely discussed in the two communions, and that discussion will be given new impetus now that the fruits of the work on authority are available.

Agreed statements are of their very nature documents for discussion, though important ones. The mandate to ARCIC (cf. the preface to the document) was to examine these three areas. But the agreement is strictly that between the theologians of the commission. In each agreed statement, they set down data and a theological assessment. In each case, the statement then goes to the respective authorities — the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury — and when they allow its publication they are asking the whole Christian community to weigh what is said, and to see whether it represents the faith of the two communions.

In brief then, the agreed statement on Authority is not an agreement between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. It is, as it were, a position paper to open out the debate on the issues which divide us. It represents a new way of approaching that discussion, and in that sense its publication represents a development of the greatest importance.

PAPAL AUTHORITY IN A WIDER CONTEXT

It is not easy to make a new start in an old debate. In the public mind, there is a deep rooted impression that the whole matter must be about the jurisdiction of the Pope, around which the sad division in the sixteenth century originally centred. Indeed, this is an issue of the highest importance, and the final pages of the document confront it squarely. But the significance of "Authority in the Church" is that the statement provides a wider context. In it, the International Commission is concerned with what Christian authority essentially is — how any Christian can speak on behalf of Christ, and show his continuing presence in the world. Only when authority is seen as the expression of the God who lives, and lives now, and is active through his people, does it make sense to go on to examine the position of the bishop of Rome within the total pattern of Christian authority.

NOT A FULL AGREEMENT . . .

The Commission has not achieved a full agreement on the question of primacy, or — in particular — papal infallibility. With fairness, it states

the Anglican reservations. They remain. Equally, Roman Catholics — speaking out of the faith they hold — are not convinced by these Anglican reservations. Nonetheless, the Commission affirms — and affirms with one voice — far more than it believed possible when it began its work six years ago. And even where it cannot affirm a common doctrine, it has been able to clear away misunderstandings, and to agree to a clear and loving statement of those convictions which the members cannot jointly hold but can jointly respect.

AUTHORITY AND CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY

The word 'authority' has baleful overtones for men and women of today. The idea of authority conjures up pictures of coercion and constraint. A discussion about authority sounds at best like a discussion on whether the power of the government should be exercised in this, that or the other way. By analogy (fed indeed by the mistakes of Christian leaders in the past) it might seem that a discussion on Christian authority would centre around another and deeper question of power — by what authority does one Christian assume the right to direct the will and control the belief of another Christian, when all authority belongs to Christ?

Not so. In "Authority in the Church" you will again and again find a beautiful Greek word used: *koinonia*, unity in common. The Christian community is bound in bonds of love. Christians must be able to speak to one another, and to all men with an openness and trust which shows the glorious liberty of the children of God. They come together because they want to be together, led and attracted by the Spirit of God. The common order they seek is for the enrichment of each. Leadership becomes the highest form of service, a stewardship of the great things that God has done for us and in us. And this gives rise to a special form of leadership: *episcope*, the ordained ministry, "looking-after" the community with a leadership and discernment which only God can give.

Hence, there are various patterns of authority in the Church. The one authority of the Lord of the Church is *mediated* through many leaders — ordained and lay — as they work for the coming of Christ's kingdom. See paragraph three — where, by way of example, one might see a busy housewife bringing up her family in a Christian way, opening up her home to those in need, looking after a lonely person next door and in all these Christian responsibilities mediating the authority of Christ among Christians and to the world.

But in a different manifestation of authority, ordained leaders must discern the truth of Christ. They bear responsibility for formulating teaching. So divisions among the Christian churches about doctrine are bound also to be divisions about authority.

DISCERNING THE TRUE PATTERN OF AUTHORITY

Filled by the Holy Spirit, the Church not only stands in the truth, but is being led into all truth. She must proclaim that truth as clearly and convincingly as she can. But a major difficulty in Christian unity work

is whether there can be very different ways of expressing the one truth without compromising the clarity required in a message which is to save all those who believe it. Even more important, how does the Church of Christ discern which ways lead her into truth and which do not? Does she live in the knowledge that by God's hidden grace she will not ultimately defect from the truth?

WHAT IS "THE CHURCH" IN THIS STATEMENT?

It is of course a paradox that divided Christians ask the same questions, and see the one Church differently. Anglicans can conscientiously speak of communities of Christians who hold very different views of the faith as parts of the Church. In the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic bishops together with the Pope insisted that the body or community they lead is that in which the Church of Christ 'subsists'. But they did not hesitate to say also that 'the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using (the separated churches and communities) as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fulness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church' (Decree on Ecumenism, 3). We as Catholics have not yet come to a fully articulated attitude to other Christian churches and bodies. Certainly, to be able to agree on a common approach to questions of authority is a momentous step forward.

But because of the difficulty that Anglicans and Catholics do not start from the same standpoint on what Christ willed to be essential to his Church, it is important to stress that wherever the agreed statement (and this commentary) speaks of 'the Church', the meaning is 'the Church as she must be, and is in principle', united and conformed to the will of Christ. It does not imply a simple joining together of two communions (or more), and does not imply any new judgements about where the Church is or is not to be found.

FORMULATING TRUTH WITH AUTHORITY

In this spirit, then, the two communions see that the Church of Christ must identify and formulate the truth of the gospel — and do so with authority. To haver on what is essential to the gospel is to betray her mandate.

Yet the inherent limitation of human nature and human language cannot be denied. The truth about God in Christ is made manifest by limited human beings. The divine power operates through our weakness, and this mystery underlies all the difficulties of understanding Christian authority. No purely human organisation is capable of manifesting the truth of Christ. But equally, the task is impossible without human organisation.

For each Christian, the questions are starkly simple: how does Christ speak to me in the Church? In the conflict of human voices, how may I distinguish his? What does the mediation of Christ's authority through his Church mean for my personal devotion and intimate belief?

Hence "Authority in the Church": a perspective on facts, the history

of the Church, and the Church's essential teaching. Much of the document relates to developments before tragic divisions began with the separation of the Christians of East and West. These the Church of that period saw as necessary to its identity. This assessment of them must be judged in the light of faith. Is too little said? Is too much said? The members of the Commission believe that they have justly rendered account of a common faith, and that their agreement — though it is incomplete — gives the setting for remaining differences to be examined in liberty and with love.

2. THE SHAPE OF THE DOCUMENT

NOT JUST A ROMAN CATHOLIC PROBLEM

Initially, the Commission feared that this study would have to issue in a totally different kind of document from the earlier texts. This impression rested on the belief that for Roman Catholics, authority was specifically associated with papal prerogatives: prerogatives which were not acknowledged by Anglicans, and perhaps even totally rejected by them.

In the event, the joint study has revealed that the problem of Christian authority is common to all traditions. It has also underlined the fact that the normal functioning of authority as guardian of truth takes place in the local church rather than at the universal level — that is to say, within the diocese gathered around its bishop.

LOCAL CHURCHES AND THE CATHOLIC FAITH

The agreed statement "Ministry and Ordination" showed moreover that this exercise of *episcope* is not in isolation from the Church universal. No local church or local bishop, it stated, can proclaim the living gospel of Christ unless they seek communion with all other local churches (dioceses) which do the same. That openness to one another was seen as essential to the communion of churches — the universal *koinonia* — and implied some way of arriving at a common mind to live one faith. Was there need, then, for a wider ministry which would look after and lead whole group of local churches in some way? In other words, the common mind needs to be authoritatively proclaimed for the benefit of all, so that everything necessary to the nature of the Church (catholicity) may be realised in each local church.

EPISCOPE AND THE BISHOP

The reference points, or co-ordinates, of "Ministry and Ordination" were *episcope* and *koinonia*. (The basic ideas were examined in chapter one). Now, they proved equally to be the co-ordinates for the study of authority. To recap briefly, though there must be various patterns of authority and leadership in the Church, a particular ministry of leadership and discernment is required if everything said and done is to be 'for the upbuilding of the Church' and not for its disintegration, and this is *episcope*. In no other way can the *koinonia* — the community of faith and love —

be maintained. In no other way can the Church maintain its identity as the Church of Christ. In our respective traditions, this ministry focuses in the episcopal office, the office of bishop.

The Commission makes no judgements on other forms of *episcope* in other Christian traditions. The members affirm their belief, as Roman Catholics and Anglicans, that authority is expressed in many different manifestations of devout life and leadership. They affirm that the Church discovers and discerns the unfolding truth of Christ in a complex way. But they also affirm that a ministry is required which — under the Holy Spirit — will ensure that the gospel is delivered to succeeding generations in its integrity. How does it operate? What does it achieve? How can it be recognised and accepted?

This is no mere matter of the credentials of a bishop as a witness to the apostolic faith. The Church *as a whole* testifies to the truth she has received. But her authority to teach true doctrine is dependent on the organic structure of the Church, of which it can be asked "Are all apostles? . . ." (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27-30).

THE STRESS OF HUMAN AND DIVINE

To think of the Christian community as a human organisation democratically structured is to be guilty of the grossest blunder imaginable. At the same time, to see it not as authoritative but as authoritarian — as though each member is directed to think and act exclusively according to a detailed programme of belief and conduct established by hierarchs — is to fall headlong into the opposite error.

The whole enterprise is dependent on human frailty even though it is sustained by Christ's abiding presence in the Spirit. But it is running a grave risk if the authority of Christ cannot be recognised in its institutions and offices, as much as in its individual members.

3. CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

The introduction shows that there is one source of Christian authority: Christ the Lord. All authority in the Church derives from his and is dependent on it. Christ communicates his own authority to those who build up this community of divine love by the power of the Spirit, so that one day it shall be delivered to the Father.

(1) CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY

The first section (paragraphs 2 and 3) sets out the origins of the gospel which the Church is committed to proclaiming. "The authentic foundation of the faith" is to be found in the witness of the apostles to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The normative record of this apostolic preaching is found in the scriptures. "Once the documents expressing the apostolic faith have been put in writing and once a choice has been made of these documents in which the first generations (of the Church) recognise what truly comes from the authorised witnesses, scripture

has the value of a primary norm of faith" (J.M.R. Tillard, OP: Sensus Fidelium, *One in Christ*, 1975, 1, p. 19).

The norm of faith is in fact the gospel as preached and lived by the Christian community. The Holy Spirit leads the Church into all truth. But the development of doctrine is always in accord with scripture. The Church's response to her Lord is controlled by this normative record of the apostolic preaching, because the revelation of God in Christ is enshrined in it.

VATICAN II SAYS

Compare this section with the words of the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, of the Second Vatican Council:

> (7) 'Christ the Lord, in whom the entire revelation of the most high God is summed up, commanded the apostles to preach the gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets, and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the gospel, they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline. This was faithfully done: it was done by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received — whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit; it was done by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing . . . (9) Sacred tradition and sacred scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move toward the same goal. Sacred scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching. Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy scriptures alone . . . (10) By adhering to (this single sacred deposit of the Word of God) the entire holy people, united to its pastors, remains always faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'.

So though nothing is said in the agreed statement at this stage of the particular way (i.e. the *episcope* of the bishops) in which the word of God is to be preached to mankind with certainty and constancy, it stresses like *Dei Verbum* the dominant direction of the Holy Spirit in the community by which it lives out the gospel with a common mind.

Paragraph 15 will be particularly explicit on this working out of tradition, and on the responsibility of the ordained leader of the Church for it. Our co-ordinates of *koinonia* and *episcope* are already in the background, as the thought begins to develop in this section.

The response of the Church to the Holy Spirit's guiding is an obedience of faith. In speaking, then, of Christian authority, we are speaking of a reality which is grounded not in human reason but in the mystery of God himself. By God's own mysterious presence with us, Christians become open and responsive to all that links man. From this community-in-God-with-men comes what they need to fulfil the responsibilities which responsiveness to human need brings. Christians can only be responsible for speaking and acting in Christ's name when the authority of Christ is in them and shines through them: when authority is, in the words of the text, mediated through them.

THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Here is the panorama of authority in its fullest and widest sense, and this is perhaps the moment to quote a working paper which Dr. Henry Chadwick prepared for the Commission to highlight the scriptural references to authority:

> " 'I am the way, the truth and the life', says the Lord. He sends out the apostles with his authority, 'He that hears you hears me' (Luke 10:16). 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .' (Matt. 28:19-20). The gospel message is to be received not as the word of men but as the word of God (2 Cor. 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:13). Those whom Christ sends are his empowered ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). Even where the apostle has no commandment of the Lord he has the right to give strong moral advice (1 Cor. 7:25) and is to be accounted steward of the Lord (1 Cor. 4:1; Titus 1:7 of the bishop). The Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). So the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), as itself resting on the one foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). The presence of Christ by the Spirit in and with the Church is a continuing gift to his people 'guiding into all the truth' (John 16:13). So the promise to the Church is that built on the rock it will withstand all the powers of evil (Matt. 16:18). In the epistle to the Ephesians the Church, which is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is an essential part of the eternal plan of God for the salvation of humanity in Christ. The society which is to bring unity to mankind in Christ must itself be one, this unity being both given and an objective of continual striving. The glory of the Head of the Church (Col. 1-2) is participated in by his Body which is therefore one (Eph. 4:4), even in face of much empirical evidence of separateness (as between Jewish and Gentile believers, Eph. 2). The apostles derive their authority not from a democratic consent of the community but from the Lord

of the Church who has given them power within the community to build up (2 Cor. 10:8). The power of the keys, primarily to give rulings on moral issues, is entrusted by Christ to Peter (Matt. 16:19), to all the apostles (John 20:23), and to the whole Church (Matt. 18:18); and the New Testament never determines which (if any) has theological priority, for in Christ all are one".

(2) AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

The thought develops. But as a starting point, the fourth paragraph reminds us again that all Christians have authority in the sense that, by the gift of the Spirit, they are enabled to live the gospel with the support of the community of faith and love, and so to exemplify it to others. Holiness of life wins respect. It is as authoritative a witness to Christian truth as Christian martyrdom.

Now section II moves on to the authority of the ordained. The great lists of the gifts of the Spirit (given in Ephesians and Corinthians) show many ways in which Christians may speak and be heeded. But among these gifts is *episcope*: the ministry (service to the Church) of the ordained. (Cf. "Ministry and Ordination".) To exercise 'oversight' — the function of 'ordering' the faith and life of the Church — involves pastoral authority. Pastor means shepherd — and the adjective reflects the traditional role of the bishop as shepherd of his flock. More than anyone else, the bishop is responsible for ensuring that the people of the local church live out to the full their common life of Christ-like love, forbearance and service. As a consequence, he can command obedience when the faith and charity of that community is endangered. Precisely because his authority is for the benefit of all, it is a ministry to and on behalf of the community. It is according to the will of Christ. (para 5.)

DISCERNMENT AND RESPONSE

Paragraph 6 raises an important point. There is no one in the Church who can, on his own, independently, *from his own resources*, interpret the gospel in such a way that his interpretation binds others. Yet he — or she — may well be opening the eyes of the Church to the way the Holy Spirit is leading. Although they themselves share the quest for a deeper perception of the gospel, it pertains to the ordained ministry to discern these insights and express them with authority.

But the matter does not end here. The day-to-day judgement of a bishop, for example, calls for a mature response from the community. This in no way relieves the body of the faithful from a general obligation to accept the norm of belief and conduct delivered by their bishop in the here-and-now — but it does indicate that these judgements are themselves open to development.

Bishops stand within the Church, not over against it, and are strictly under the Word of God. The gospel must be preached to a constantly evolving world where situations change. At the same time the Church

herself deepens her understanding through listening to *herself*, not just to her bishops and scholars. Nevertheless, she must through her ordained ministers "order" the belief and conduct of her members. As a Church incarnate in history, she will necessarily "re-order" that same belief and conduct in the light of new understandings but always in submission to the Word of God. She has no option but to live out her existence in the world of men with all its human limitations and inadequacies. In other words, her judgements are contingent, whoever makes them. Always? No, not always. But the subject of infallibility is not yet broached. The material of this paragraph underlines the normal exercise of authority in the Church rather than the privileged occasion of that exercise.

(3) AUTHORITY IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCHES

The third section concerns the exercise of authority in the *koinonia* of local churches (dioceses) which is the universal Church. In each local church, the Church of Christ is incarnate, in the sense that the whole works through the part. No local church can affirm its identity as the (local) embodiment of the Church of Christ unless other local churches recognise themselves in that embodiment. Do they both celebrate one eucharist, preach one faith, pursue basically the same gospel life-style? In this recognition the link of *koinonia* is established and the universal communion is built up. In fact, the test of the authenticity of each local church is precisely its link of communion with every other local church.

COUNCILS . . .

There is more to be said. The *koinonia* is a living interchange of responsibilities which need to be shared if they are to be borne wisely and well. The document appeals to history to substantiate this affirmation. From the very beginning of the Church's life there was a spontaneous movement to unite in council in order to test that faith and love, and to see whether it was according to the heart of Christ. Decisions taken at these councils became authoritative for all participants and could — by process of reception by other churches too distant to be represented at the actual encounter — enter into a wider area of the Church's life. This movement from the bottom developed into a conciliar structure acceptable to the Church at large (reference is made to the great ecumenical councils of the Church) and certain decisions on matters of faith were regarded as binding on all. We return to this later.

. . . AND PRIMATES

There emerged at the same time the patriarchal system with the acceptance of the particular authority of the metropolitan who, in shared responsibility with the bishop of the region, could exercise a general oversight even to the point of intervention in the affairs of a particular

diocese. The dogmatic principle is affirmed (para. 10) that the Church of God is found in each local church "and in their *koinonia*". Already therefore, the document is moving out of the purely descriptive into the doctrinal. It is clear that the actual development of the Church is one of the many data which enter into its own self-understanding. Not all development is right but every development must be assessed in the light of the Church's understanding of the gospel. In other words, the historical development of the Church is never pure history!

"It is within the context of the historical development", in the words of the text, "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." This is what happened and with it a doctrinal reflection that there was an analogy between the relation of Peter to the rest of the apostles and the bishop of Rome to all the bishops of the Church. The notion of a specific Petrine office inherent in this bishop emerged as part of the developing consciousness of the Church about its structure and its shape.

THE AUTHORITY OF ROMAN DOCTRINE

It is helpful here to quote one of the position papers received by the Commission in the course of its debates:

> "Among the local churches the ancient Fathers held the churches of apostolic foundation in special respect, and particularly the church of Rome where the apostles Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom. It was wise custom from early times to consult the Roman See on difficult questions of doctrine (Innocent I, in *Aug. Ep.*, 181-182). From the mid-third century onwards, and especially from Damasus (366-384), the Petrine text of Matt. 16 comes to be quoted at Rome (or by controversialists elsewhere who needed Rome's support) as providing the scriptural ground for this special position. Hence Leo the Great's *Tome* of June 449, issued as an authoritative pronouncement in virtue of the Petrine office and, in Leo's eyes, making the Eastern emperor's ecumenical council superfluous, and certainly making synodical debate of its content wholly inappropriate (*Ep.*, 82; 90; 93-94). The *Tome* is less important in doctrinal aspects than as a milestone in Roman authority since Leo sees primacy as merging with an ultimate authority in dogmatic definition. Not only the Greek bishops at Chalcedon but Leo's Western bishops at Milan or in Gaul accept it, however, not because Leo has promulgated it but because on examination they find it orthodox (*Ep.*, 68; 97).
>
> "Parallel with this is Augustine's treatment of the Petrine text which he never interprets of Rome. To Augustine, one becomes a rock by true obedience to the word of God (*C. Faustum*, 22.90), which is to share in the communion of saints which does not fail (*Ep.*, 53.2). Accordingly Peter, in Matt. 16, is representing the

whole Church. This in no way implies that Augustine does not hold the Roman See in warm regard as a great source of authority. A delicate judgement may therefore be discerned in the fact that the Formula of Hormisdas, by which in 519 the Eastern episcopate was required to recognise the primacy of Rome as a condition of restored unity after thirty-four years of schism, does not exactly ground this primacy on Matt. 16, but cites the text in juxtaposition with the claim that Rome has never departed from orthodoxy, which is 'to follow the decisions of the Fathers in all things'."

(Dr. Chadwick)

This summary by an eminent Church historian underscores the agreement by the Commission that the Roman primacy rests on firmer foundations than an over-simplistic exegesis of the famous Petrine text, "You are Peter . . ." (Matt. 16:18-19). Far from derogating from Catholic belief, this account of the emergence of a universal conviction about the pre-eminent position of the bishop of Rome should reinforce it. The doctrine taught in Rome was seen by the rest of the Church to be supremely orthodox: hence agreement with that doctrine became the test of authenticity.

HISTORY

Paragraph 12 is crucial, but the 'status' of each of its sub-paragraphs probably needs comment, in case they should be misunderstood. In the first two sub-paragraphs, the Commission is giving an agreed description of the position in the early Church before the divisions began. The rest of the paragraph is a description of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The paragraph closes with a positive evaluation of the Roman primacy, but it does not at this stage express an agreed affirmation of the Catholic position — that there must be this primacy at the universal level to provide that ministry of unity without which the Church of Christ cannot be catholic. This must be read in conjunction with paragraph 23, where that joint assertion is in fact made in other words.

So paragraph 12, at its end, describes an intention which is obviously good and worthy: a primacy 'to guard and promote the faithfulness of the churches to Christ and one another', communion with which is safeguard of catholicity and sign of communion. But it does not say that such an arrangement is 'of divine right' *(de jure divino)*. At this point, the commission goes no further. But in paragraph 23, it agrees to say that the universal primacy, and central focus for the local churches to meet each other together in council 'needs' (*sic*) to be realised, 'if God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled'. This extremely significant statement then — a milestone in ecumenical relations — registers the agreement of the Commission that a universal primacy is according to the will of Christ. As in "Ministry and Ordination" (where the emergence of *episcope* was agreed to be according to the will of Christ) the

Commission avoids the canonical language, which it did not feel to be apposite in the context of its own method of enquiry.*

(4) AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF FAITH

The fourth section broaches the sensitive area of authority in matters of faith. If the local church is to be 'truly faithful to Christ', it must desire 'to foster universal communion', or (in our own idiom) seek the unity of Christ's Church (para. 13). To do this, it needs a deeper understanding of the common faith, and a clearer expression of it. We are here in the middle of the arena of modern discussion about the formulation in words of the Church's faith, and what it means for the Christian community to accept those formulations. Does the inherent relativity of human language make every formulation of strictly limited value, and thus expendable? The Vatican declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* contradicted such a view in emphatic terms, and in this agreed statement too there is an acceptance of the traditional position that some formulations of doctrine have permanent value, even though their language may be historically conditioned and their understanding partial.

Paragraph 14 describes the way the Church has found it indispensable to commit herself to creeds and definitions. These, like every pronouncement of the Church concerning what she believes, are rooted in the apostolic tradition and in the living experience of the past. In order then to find adequate language to express her belief she searches the *memory* of the Church — what has been delivered in the scriptures concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, with the interpretation of these events by the apostolic Church, as this has been handed on through successive generations. Each age has acquired the wisdom of its predecessor and, happily, contributed its own.

Paragraph 15 affirms a fact of primary importance — that "the Church has endorsed certain formulas as authentic expressions of its witness, whose significance transcends the setting in which they were first formulated". Certainly, the truths expressed can be reformulated but "restatement always builds upon, and does not contradict, the truth intended by the original definition". The agreed position enunciated by the Commission here may have highly important consequences for the two churches. Here there is a convergence on what Roman Catholics term the infallibility of the Church. In other words, the theological experts of the Commission agree that the Church is able to commit herself irrevocably to certain doctrinal positions. Well, what a council

* The Commission avoids the categories of *ius divinum* (of divine right) and *ius humanum* (of human institution) and similarly stands aside from the traditional distinction between what is of the very nature of the Church (its *esse*) and what is a suitable and constructive and appropriate development in the Church (its *bene esse*). An interesting comment on another dialogue (the USA Lutheran/Catholic conversation) illuminates this question of terminology further: "The Lutherans evaluate the primacy as *de iure humano*, not *de iure divino*, and they recognise the limit of the consensus reached. But the participants to the dialogue do not regard the traditional distinction (*iure divino, iure humano*) as separating the churches, for the Lutherans think that an institution for unity of the Church is grounded in the will of God". (Cardinal Willebrands, July 1976).

of the fourth century can do with confidence can also be done in the twentieth century.

Paragraph 16 notes the part played by 'reception' (that is to say, the acknowledgement of the doctrine of a council by the Church at large), and accepts the need for time to elapse while this process reaches its goal. 'This process is often gradual, as the decisions come to be seen in perspective through the Spirit's continuing guidance of the whole Church', says the Commission. Compare the twenty-fifth paragraph of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*): 'Now the assent of the Church can never be lacking to such (infallible) definitions on account of the same Holy Spirit's influence, through which Christ's whole flock is maintained in the unity of the faith and makes progress in it'.

The Commission was in agreement (para. 17) that the criteria for the recognition of the validity of conciliar decrees are complex. It resorted to historical data to outline the process, recording the fact that the agreement of the Roman See was seen in the early Church as necessary for this acceptance. It also struck a very positive note in its assertion that "by their agreement or disagreement the local church of Rome and its bishop fulfilled their responsibility towards other local churches and their bishops for maintaining the whole Church in the truth. In addition the bishop of Rome was also led to intervene in controversies relating to matters of faith — in most cases in response to appeals made to him, but sometimes on his own initiative".

To repeat what has already been said: the Commission accepts this as a valid historical account of what has happened and even sees its appropriateness, which indicates a common mind regarding the manner in which the primacy can forward the purposes for which Christ founded the Church. It is of great value to achieve an agreed interpretation of what actually happened, for this promotes a convergence in doctrinal understanding. But it cannot force it, any more than the act of faith itself can be forced. As Cardinal Willebrands, speaking to an American audience concerning the Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue on Papal Primacy in July 1976, notes:

> "The American document about primacy manifests a convergence, not yet a full consensus. But ecumenism thrives on these growing and widening convergences".

Paragraph 18 is introduced by a weighty doctrinal affirmation, that "in its mission to proclaim and safeguard the gospel the Church has the *obligation* and *competence* to make declarations in matters of faith". But to fulfil this mandate involves an interplay of varied 'forces' within the Church and at times this provokes conflict. "The Church", the Commission unanimously affirms, "must have effective means for resolving it".

Perhaps the indefectibility of the Church could not be better described than in the words of paragraph 18. Indefectibility, after all, is not a human category and relates to the grace of God in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit overrides inevitable human failure, but still fully within

the human situation. For this failure "cannot destroy the Church's ability to proclaim the gospel and to show forth the Christian life" — a responsibility centred on the bishop but not restricted to him.

(5) CONCILIAR AND PRIMATIAL AUTHORITY

"When the Church meets in ecumenical council its decision on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous". This is another striking doctrinal agreement, on the infallibility of general councils. It comes at the beginning of paragraph 19.

The bishops make authoritative judgements in council: these must be consonant with scripture. When these decisions are made on central truths of faith, the Spirit prevents error. The agreement on what conciliar decisions have this infallible quality is a restricted one. The Anglican Communion confines its recognition to the general councils of the Church in the first centuries, before the Eastern (Orthodox) Church and the Roman Church of the West ceased from communion. But the way the Commission has presented the principles leaves the door open to further investigations. The 'other forms of conciliarity' of the note on 19 also require study. These include the Lambeth Conference, and synodical government. But what is important is to take account of the general agreement that the conciliar structure is part of the enduring shape of the Church, and is one of the ways which are crucial for her stand in the truth.

PARAGRAPHS 20 TO 23

Whatever the collective responsibility of the episcopate in this regard (paragraph 20), it must also be affirmed that primacy includes a particular *episcopal* responsibility. A primate may speak the mind of the Church and, in this sense, "determine" its faith. As paragraph 21 shows, this episcopal office is rooted in the *koinonia* and for the *koinonia* — 'for the building up of the Church'. Its object is unity, but not uniformity. What the final sentences of paragraph 21 say of primatial authority in general, the First Vatican Council says in particular of the relationship of the Pope to the local bishop. In paragraph 22 — which introduces the conclusion of the Commission regarding primatial and conciliar authority — the point is made that both exercises are exercises of the *episcope* which is proper to the Church of Christ and are complementary one to the other.

In paragraph 23 there is something of a momentous shift, even though the conclusion is not new and has been adumbrated before in Anglican circles. It is the recognition that the pattern of *episcope* outlined in the preceding paragraphs *needs* to be "realised at the universal level". As we have already stressed, the Commission describes without ambiguity a necessity which is related to "God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community". The exact shape this should take is not dealt with, at least at this point in our dialogue. Yet the acknowledgment of the existence of the exercise of this kind of *episcope* in the see of Rome is important. This is not an acceptance

in detail or even in substance of the manner in which the bishop of Rome exercises this kind of *episcope*. But the Commission seems to look forward in hope, as it reviews the history of this see and the constant recognition from an early date of its centrality (particularly in resolving conflict and endorsing conciliar definition). The see of Rome would fittingly play its role, to fulfil "God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community".

"Appropriate" is not a word signifying that things must inevitably be as they are. But neither is it, in the Commission's thinking and language, a neutral word indicating the purely optional. This wording was chosen after a long and intricate debate. Everything that has been said, once the need for a primacy at the universal level has been accepted, leads to a justification for choosing the Roman See and its bishop for its exercise. This is indeed less than a Roman Catholic would say, and may be more than some Anglicans could receive. Its important significance lies in the agreement in principle about the universal primacy — and the principle is doctrinal, not purely historical.

(6) PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

The first paragraph (24) should not be dismissed lightly as though agreement on the need for a Petrine ministry were a light matter. "All the problems associated with papal primacy" are not wholly solved. The obvious inference is that many are, and even those remaining (which are now listed) are not regarded as insoluble.

The Commission has not been able, nonetheless, to come to total agreement. While its Roman Catholic members see the Petrine ministry exercised by the Pope as part of the constitution of the Church in accordance with the will of Christ, they are aware that false polemic and inadequate arguments have been used to support this position of faith. Anglican members, it will have been seen, are very much aware of the weight of the Church's tradition in ascribing a primatial role to the bishop of Rome. But there are also Anglican doubts about certain aspects of the papacy, not least the exercise of infallibility.

What then do the *Anglican* members of the Commission consider the real obstacles to lifting our large areas of agreement on to the level of unqualified consensus?

THE POSITION OF PETER

The first concerns the *Petrine texts*. These particular texts are not dismissed as unimportant or irrelevant, only that they have been held to *prove* the papal claims — and this modern scriptural exegetes do not accept *in toto*. What is questioned here is an over-simplistic exegesis of these texts in Matthew, Luke and John which applies them to the bishop of Rome. This was a relatively 'late' interpretation, and not a universal one either. Meanwhile, nothing is said here of the overall scriptural basis for ascribing a particular ministry to Peter (such as has been done by Raymond Brown in *Peter in the New Testament*).

DIVINE RIGHT

The second difficulty concerns the concepts of divine right, *ius divinum,* which we mentioned earlier on page 29. The term is not altogether clear in Catholic theology. But certainly, Roman Catholics hold the primacy of the bishop of Rome to be a matter of faith. For the Anglican Communion, there is matter for objection in what seems to be a consequence of this papal claim — namely, that a church out of communion with the see of Rome and its bishop is "less than fully a church". We touch here the question of how each church conceives itself, its own self-understanding. At first sight it would seem we have arrived at an insuperable obstacle.

Roman Catholic understanding of the Church of Christ and its incarnation in history has indeed developed, (Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio,* the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council). And in England and Wales, the National Commission on Ecumenism's response to the Ten Propositions of the Churches' Unity Commission (cf. paras. 3 and 4, pp. 1 and 2, and para. 1, p. 3) is relevant. Nonetheless, as we saw in chapter one, it has not abandoned its claim to the unique position of being that Christian community in which the Church of Christ 'subsists'. Not unnaturally, the Anglican Communion resists this exclusive claim, though it would probably assert that as long as Christians remain separated, the full communion willed by Christ belongs to the future. And this must for them imply the partialness of any Christian church today.

Of course, many will be disappointed that matters of such importance are not resolved by this particular dialogue. The Commission reminds them that it has a limited scope, and cannot of itself reconcile separated churches. As the text notes, for some "this difficulty would be removed by simply restoring communion". For others, the implications of underlying doctrine would be seen as blocking any further progress.

The Commission is probably speaking realistically when it accepts that our unity will be 'by stages', while its Roman Catholic members find the categories of 'full and imperfect communion' of use in approaching the reality of our separation.

INFALLIBILITY OF THE POPE

The third difficulty is of long standing, but here it is stated concisely. The notion of infallibility is presented to the reader with precision. The words *infallibilis* and *infallibilitas* belong to the twelfth century, though the belief that the Church is enabled to speak God's truth without distorting it is at the very root of the Church's faith. To define a truth pertaining to salvation is to guard it, to *limit it,* in order that it may be known and its implications lived.

However, with all the safeguards (and they are many) which are contained in *Pastor Aeternus* — the famous Constitution of Vatican I — and in spite of the insistence of that magisterial text that the infallibility which the Pope enjoys is that which Christ bestowed on his

Church, the Anglican tradition is hostile to this personal prerogative. Not all this hostility is due to misunderstanding nor to the exaggerations of Catholic apologetic.

In general, the Anglican Church, like the Catholic Church, trusts in the guidance of the Holy Spirit — but the latter sees this guidance, however diffuse, focused in the ministry of unity which is the unique prerogative of the Pope. Pope Paul VI, in his recent letter to Archbishop Lefebvre, illustrates his own understanding of his ministry when he says:

> "We are the guarantor of this (that the Second Vatican Council was faithful to two thousand years of tradition), not in virtue of our personal qualities but in virtue of the charge which the Lord has conferred upon us as well as Peter: 'I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail' (Lk 22:32). The universal episcopate is guarantor with us of this".

Perhaps the Catholic Church has been preoccupied in the defence of infallibility. Instead, we need to study carefully the role or life-style adopted by our present Holy Father. The words just quoted are far from minimalist, but put an accent on the central idea of guarantor to which the response of the Christian community is surely trust.

DEFINED TEACHING ABOUT MARY

The Marian dogmas, it is said, remain a difficulty. This should cause little surprise, not because Mary is not honoured in the Anglican Communion (the opposite is the case, even if the devotional style is different), but because these dogmas belong to a different category from the great Christological or Trinitarian dogmas. Fr. J.M.R. Tillard may well be right when he asserts that "the two recent dogmas were motivated not by the need to defend the faith but by the need to fix popular fervour" (Sensus fidelium, *One in Christ*, 1975-1, p. 11). Perhaps what the Anglican tradition finds least acceptable is the act of definition rather than the object of the definition, but it is for Anglican commentators to react to this opinion.

UNIVERSAL JURISDICTION

The fourth objection concerns the Roman Catholic affirmation that the Pope possesses universal immediate jurisdiction or, in other terms, that just as each bishop in his diocese possesses by reason of his office the authority to rule and guide the local church, so the Pope by reason of his office as bishop of Rome possesses an authority co-extensive with the whole Church.

Much could be said here of the difficulty of defining what we mean by 'universal jurisdiction' — for even in the most recent authoritative documents of the Roman Catholic Church no definition is offered of the operative word, 'jurisdiction'. Yet it is impossible to attribute primatial responsibility without conceding the necessary power (*exousia*) to exercise that responsibility. *Pastor Aeternus* insists that this jurisdiction is inherent in the papal office "ad aedificationem Ecclesiae, non

ad eius destructionem" (for the building-up of the Church, not for its destruction). Hence constant interference in diocesan affairs or any tendency to reduce bishops to 'auxiliaries of the Roman See' contradicts the purpose of this particular ministry of unity. The Anglican difficulty does appear as answerable in the terms already suggested in the body of both text and commentary.

TO THE FUTURE

Paragraph 25 is as much an expression of hope as a statement of position. The consequences of our joint study can indeed be far-reaching. The words of the text need no explanation, for in many ways they describe once again the method whereby the Commission has been enabled to offer this text to our respective authorities and to our well-wishers in other Christian churches and communities.

The *Conclusion* is in the same vein. Some will argue, no doubt, that the "qualifications of paragraph 24" undermine the agreement reached. But to assert this may be to say that the whole debate about Christian authority between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church is reducible to an argument about the authenticity of papal prerogatives.

Both communions need to go beyond this particular question not by side-stepping this issue (which the document does not do) but by widening the perspective and seeking together to identify what we understand Christian authority to be in all its aspects. This should be the ground of our reconciliation at all levels of faith. In fact, the Commission is convinced that the three agreements, however qualified — if they were, of course, accepted by the two communions — argue for a greater degree of communion in life, worship and mission. For these agreements touch the central affirmation of the one faith. Anglicans and Roman Catholics must both face the gospel's question: by what authority do we do these things which we consider necessary not only for our own salvation but for the salvation of the world, and how far should we be doing them in separation?

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