

Criticism of the Venice Statement

Criticism of the Statement on Authority may be grouped under three heads and subdivided as follows. We set them out schematically. The references in the brackets are to ARCIC 173/Venice/11, which attempts to respond to the criticisms concerned.

1. Our presuppositions and methodology are misconceived because

- a) truth is ineffable and therefore not subject to intellectual treatment (paragraph 1);
- b) theologising is irrelevant to the real needs of the Church and the World (paragraph 1);
- c) our 'inductive' or historical method cannot lead us to that certainty of faith by which the Christian lives.

(Note: These objections, though they happen to have come to the surface after the appearance of the Venice Statement, could have been raised with equal validity against both its predecessors. If any reply is made to them, therefore, it would be best placed in the introduction to all three documents.)

2. We have mishandled the concept of authority itself by

- a) treating it equivocally, that is, we have obscured the difference in kind between ministerial authority and other forms of authority described in Part II of the Statement (paragraph 4, 2nd amendment);
- b) attributing to the Christian community a magisterial authority which it does not and cannot possess. The most solemn pronouncements of the Church remain human judgements and hence liable to error, as well as being

of necessity inadequate (cf. Article 21 of Thirty Nine Articles). The intellectual freedom without which the Spirit cannot work fruitfully in the Church is threatened by and (in the last resort) is incompatible with an ecclesiology which claims that there can never be finality in the process of fides quaerens intellectum. Moreover, every theological expression of the meaning of dogma or 'article of faith' is fraught with human fallibility. Finally and most fundamentally, the real issue facing us is not so much authority in the Church as the authority and hence credibility of Christian revelation itself. (paragraphs 5 and 7).

3. We have mishandled the concept of primacy by

- a) treating it as homogeneous, that is, in explaining the activities or functions which are common to all primacy whether local (or regional) or universal, we have obscured what is unique about the universal (paragraph 6);
- b) ignoring the experience and witness of the Eastern Churches, whose patriarchates must supply a model for any discussion of primacy (paragraph 3).