

Correspondence about the Statement on Authority published in "Theology", September and November 1977

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Dear Editors,

I am delighted that Dr. Chadwick has responded to my article with his customary clarity and charity; but I am concerned that he has not addressed himself to what I conceive to be my chief difficulty. However inductively it was argued, what seemed to me the 'hierarchical' view of authority in the Agreed Statement appears to be in striking contrast to the view of disseminated authority found in official Anglican documents. (Perhaps Dr. Chadwick might place us further in his debt here with another exchange?) Precisely because rock-climbing from the bottom upwards, however admirable a method, seems to be faced here literally with an impasse, the suggestion was made of immediate reciprocal communion, a method also proposed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his recent sermon in Rome. This is not a 'cable car to the summit'; but it could promote that dynamic growth into unity which is the underlying aim of the Ten Propositions. To believe that the Holy Spirit does indeed lead his Church into 'unity of faith' is not the same as to think that it can have identity of dogma. (In the latter area the Holy Spirit could even give us a creative dialectic of disagreement.) As for those who see continuing difficulties from Apostolicae Curae, the general acclaim accorded to the first two A.R.C.I.C. Statements, on the Eucharist and on the Ministry, might provide them with an adequate answer.

HUGH MONTEFIORE

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Dear Editors,

It is rather unfair of Bishop Hugh Montefiore (and also, I think, just a bit unscholarly) to set an incomplete quotation from the Article XXI in polemical juxtaposition with an incomplete quotation from the Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church (May 1977). The last sentence of Article XXI runs: 'Wherefore things ordained by (General Councils) as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority unless it may be declared that they be taken out of holy Scripture' (my italics). If we take this in conjunction with Article XX we may quite properly infer that the Church of England has maintained:

- (a) Things ordained by General Councils as necessary to salvation do have strength and authority provided it may be declared that they be taken out of Scripture,
- (b) The reason why some General Councils have erred is because they have ordained certain things 'contrary to God's Word written:

If we turn to the Agreed Statement (V, 19) we read, immediately before the sentence quoted by Bishop Montefiore: 'In times of crisis or when fundamental matters of faith are in question, the Church can make judgements, consonant with Scripture, which are authoritative' (my italics). Now I grant that 'consonant with' is not quite the same thing as 'taken out of'. But in the first chapter of the Agreed Statement (passed over very lightly by Bishop Montefiore) the authority of Scripture is treated of in words which strongly recall articles VI and

XX. '... to (Holy Scripture) 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.' (I, 2).

To be sure, it is never possible to discover the exact meaning of anything written by theologians. But if Bishop Montefiore actually desires, in all sincerity, to uphold the letter as well as the spirit of the Anglican formularies I suggest that he can affirm the conciliar doctrine of the Agreed Statement without violence to Article XXI.

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