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ARCIC 226/Introduction/2.

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH: ELUCIDATION

Comments and Criticisms

After the publication of the Venice Statement on Authority in the Church the Commission received comments and criticisms, among which it judges the following to be of special concern.

Questions have been raised about the Commission's use of the term koinonia. It has been suggested that the treatment of the place and authority of the laity in the Church is inadequate. There have also been requests for a clarification of the nature of Christian authority, of jurisdiction and the problem of compliance.

Underlying many reactions to the Venice Statement is a degree of uneasiness as to whether the Commission gives to certain historical developments an authority comparable to Scripture.

It has been asked whether the criteria for ecumenical councils include reception and there has been a request for the distinction between 'indefectibility' and 'infallibility' to be defined. In this connection some commentators have claimed that what the Statement says about the protection of an ecumenical council from error is in conflict with Article 21 of the Anglican 39 Articles of Religion. Behind these issues there have been questions concerning the normative nature of history in relation to doctrine. Does belief in the 'indefectibility' of the Church and 'doctrinal development' imply an automatic ratification of the past?

Some questions have been asked about the status of regional primacy. A recurring question has been whether the Commission is suggesting that a universal primacy is a theological necessity simply because one has existed or been claimed. It is alleged that the Statement is weighted in favour of the principle that what happened in history had to happen and so has normative value. In different ways this is a problem for both Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

In what follows the Commission attempts to address itself to these problems and to elucidate the Venice Statement as it bears on each of them. In seeking to answer the criticisms that have been received we have sometimes thought it more important to elucidate the basic issues that underlie them.