

The Place of the Laity

Critics of the Venice document maintain that there is too much stress upon the external manifestation of the koinonia, and consequently an emphasis upon the hierarchical structure of the Church to the neglect of the laity. The spiritual nature of koinonia has never been a matter of disagreement between our two communions. The Church as koinonia is not only the mystical reality of the union of all Christians with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, but also its visible expression. Moreover, if the visible community is not to cease to ~~manifest~~ this inner reality, it has to maintain and deepen the relationship between its members as well as its relationship to God. This is realized by a common faith, a shared sacramental life and mutual love.

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In guarding and developing this communion, every member has a part to play. Since this unity is created by the Holy Spirit, who distributes his gifts to each for the common good, every member is enabled to fulfil his own part in the life of the body. Baptism gives everyone in the Church the right, and consequently the ability, to carry out his particular function in the body. Each member has a contribution to make, even if it is not a form of ordained ministry.

The official recognition of this fundamental right is of great importance. In different ways, even if sometimes very hesitantly, our two churches have sought to integrate those who are not ordained in decision-making. At times powerful laity have exploited this right for their own ends to the detriment of the spiritual freedom of the Church, but more often the problem has been the reduction of this function to mere consultation, significant though that consultation might be.

The reason why the Venice Statement spoke at length about the structure of ministerial authority was that this was the area where most difficulties appeared to exist. There was no intention of implying that the laity only played a subsidiary role. For instance, we said that the Holy Spirit gives to some individuals and communities special

gifts for the benefit of the Church (para.5), that all the members of the Church share in the discovery of God's will (para 6), that the sensus fidelium is a vital element in the comprehension of God's truth (para.18), and that all witness to God's compassion for mankind and his concern for justice in the world (Canterbury 7).

### Hierarchical Authority

When speaking of what some of our critics call 'hierarchical authority' - an expression we avoided - we are dealing with a form of authority which concerns the visible structure of the Church. We were asked to clarify what we mean by the jurisdiction attached to this kind of authority. Since the Holy Spirit always gives to each person the power to fulfil his function in the body and since episcopate is a necessary function for the life and witness of the people of God, then those exercising episcopate will be appropriately endowed for their function. Consequently the members of the community have to recognize this gift God has bestowed and accept it for what it is.

This specific oversight is exercised and acknowledged when the ordained minister is the one who presides at the Eucharist and preaches the word of God, and seeks in his pastoral capacity to lead the community into the true discernment of the meaning of God's word and its relevance to Christian living. This latter may also be discharged in common with others sharing the same episcopate. When his responsibility leads him to declare that some doctrine is wrong or some person is in error, even to the point of exclusion from participation in eucharistic communion, he is acting for the sake of the integrity of the community's faith and life. Both our communions have always recognized the need for such disciplinary action on certain occasions and have seen it as part of the authority given by Christ to his ministers, however difficult it may be to exercise. This is what we meant by saying that "the bishop can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its daily life" (para.5). At the same time the authority of the ordained minister is not isolated from the exercise of the responsibility of the rest of the community, for all its members, whatever their particular role in the body, are involved in preserving the Community's integrity.

Jurisdiction

Power of jurisdiction is given for the effective fulfilment of an office, and its exercise and limits are determined by what that office involves. Every form of jurisdiction given to those exercising episcopate is to serve and strengthen either the koinonia in the community or that between different Christian communities. In both our communions we find dioceses comprising different parishes, groups of dioceses at the provincial, national or international level, each of them being under the responsibility of a special episcopate.

It has been questioned whether we imply that the jurisdiction associated with these different levels of episcopate is always similar in kind (e.g. Metropolitans and local bishops), with the possible conflict that this might entail. We believe that the problem is not basically that of jurisdiction but of the complementarity and harmonious working of these differing forms of episcopate in the one body of Christ. If jurisdiction is the power necessary for the fulfilment of an office, it varies according to the specific functions of each form of episcopate. That is why the use of this juridical vocabulary does not mean that we attribute to all those exercising episcopate at different levels exactly the same power. Thus for example the jurisdiction of a metropolitan in his province does not mean exercising on a broader field the same power exercised by the local bishop in his diocese. The difference in the jurisdictional power exercised at a wider level than that of the local bishop is a difference of kind. It is not a heightened form of the power proper to the local bishop.

### The Primacy of Scripture

We have been criticised for not paying adequate attention in our documents to the primary authority of Scripture, while seeming to treat the tradition as a separate source of authority. Our description of 'the inspired documents...as a normative record of the authentic foundation of the faith' we felt to be an inadequate statement (para. 2). A subsidiary criticism has been our apparent neglect of the Old Testament.

The basis of our approach is the affirmation that Christ is God's final word to man. He is the culmination of the diverse ways in which God has spoken since the beginning (Hebrews 1: 1-3). It was in the Spirit that Moses and the prophets spoke the word of God: it was in the Spirit that the Word of God became flesh and accomplished his ministry. After Pentecost the same Spirit was given to the disciples to recall what Jesus taught and to be enabled to interpret it. The centre of this revelation is Jesus, the Word of God. The record and interpretation of the deeds and words of Jesus in the New Testament, given through the Holy Spirit, are the norm for Christian faith and life.

Jesus himself founded his teaching upon the Old Testament and interpreted his role in the light of it. In preaching Jesus as Messiah and Lord, the apostolic community related its faith to the faith and hope of the people of the Old Testament. For even though the Law of the Old Testament is superseded by the death and resurrection of the Lord, he is its fulfilment and not its destroyer. The people of God in the Old Testament were moving towards the fulfilment of their hopes in the coming of Christ. The Christian Church is led by the Spirit to live out this

fulfilment in Christ until he comes again in glory. Since Jesus is the Word of God, who sums up in himself all the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments, the Church, guided by the Spirit of the risen Lord, must seek to unfold the full extent and implications of the mystery in Christ. That is why every endeavour of the Church to express the truth cannot add to the revelation already given and must be tested by its consonance with Scripture.

The extent to which any affirmation concerning the faith is clearly rooted in the Scriptures determines its level in the hierarchy of truths. Our two communions agree that the adhesion of the Church to the content of its pronouncements on matters of faith is ultimately determined by the degree to which that content is rooted in the apostolic writings. The difficulty between our communions lies in the way we draw conclusions from Scripture. But when we look at the whole history of the Church, for instance the differing exegetical methods of the fathers of Antioch and Alexandria, is this necessarily an insurmountable obstacle to unity?

## Councils and Reception

The Commission has been asked to say whether reception by the whole people of God is part of the process of the recognition of Ecumenical Councils. It has also been accused of contradicting Article 21 of the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion in its affirmation that the decisions of Ecumenical Councils on fundamental matters of faith "exclude what is erroneous".

To respond to these criticisms it is necessary to recall the general argument of the Venice Statement. The Commission affirms that in spite of inadequacies and actual errors of judgement the Church, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will never depart so radically from the Gospel as to cease to exist as the Church of Christ. It is in this sense that the Church in spite of its failures is described as indefectible, this indefectibility being the realization of the promise of Christ himself for his Church through the Holy Spirit. This assurance implies that in times of serious crisis when there is real danger of the Church making a permanent judgement contrary to the Gospel the Holy Spirit protects the Church from such error. This is the limited meaning of the word 'infallible'. Though not all would wish to use this term, which was not employed by the ancient Church, 'infallibility' can thus be seen as one of the means by which the Church as a whole is indefectibly kept in the truth. 'Infallibility' implies that the Church can make a decisive judgement which becomes part of its permanent witness to Christ. It does not mean that doctrinal definitions cannot be restated in categories of thought more appropriate to subsequent cultures. So, for example, though the Church's affirmation about the person of Christ at Chalcedon is irreversible, the implications of that affirmation require constant reflection in the continuing life of the Church (cf. Venice 14, 15, 18)

Only those judgements of general councils are guaranteed to "exclude what is erroneous" or are "protected from error" which have as their content "fundamental matters of faith" or "formulate the central truths of salvation", and which are "consonant with Scripture" and "faithful to Scripture and consistent with Tradition". Such decisions "do not add to the truth" (Cf. Venice 19). The calling of a General Council is another criterion for the recognition of inerrancy. It is essential that all those who are entitled to attend be invited. Reception too is part of the process of recognition.

The Commission is thus very far from saying that general councils cannot err and is well aware that they "sometimes have erred", e.g. Ariminum and Seleucia. Article 21 of the 39 Articles of Religion in fact affirms that general councils have authority when their judgements "may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture".

Reception must therefore be the ultimate sign whether the necessary conditions for an ecumenical council have been met, for the Holy Spirit guides the Church to accept those conciliar judgements which have been protected from error by the same Holy Spirit and to reject those which have not. In this acceptance or rejection the whole Church is involved in a continuous process of discernment and response (cf. paragraph 6).

The Commission therefore avoids two extreme positions. On the one hand it rejects the view that a definition has no authority until it is accepted by the whole Church, and derives its authority solely from that acceptance. Equally, the Commission denies that a council is so self-sufficient that it owes nothing to reception. Ultimate acceptance by the People of God is a sign of truth in the Church.

#### Regional Primacy

Concern has been voiced that the Commission's treatment of regional primacy is inadequate. In particular a consideration of the Orthodox tradition of autocephalous patriarchates has been requested.

The Commission is by no means unaware of this tradition and avoided specific terms such as 'Metropolitan' and 'Patriarch' in the Venice Statement solely on the grounds of the complex historical problems associated with their precise origins and functions. In speaking of the bishops of principal sees having a particular episcope over other bishops in their regions, the Commission intends to point to the reality behind the historical terms used for this form of episcopal co-responsibility in both east and west. It also affirms the contemporary development and importance of new forms of regional primacy in both our traditions, e.g. the elective presidencies of Roman Catholic episcopal conferences and certain elective primacies in the Anglican Communion.

#### Primacy and History

The Commission has been criticised for commending the primacy of the Roman See solely on the basis of history: what happened had to happen and is therefore normative. In answering this criticism it is again necessary to recall the development of the logic of the Venice Statement and to discern the different levels at which the Commission speaks.

In the first place the Commission presupposes that the unity in truth of the whole Christian community must be expressed visibly if it is to be fully realised (see Introduction). Secondly, the Commission makes the fundamental affirmation that from the beginning of the Christian Church there existed an episcope which included fostering the unity of the Christian community. Thirdly, the Commission observes that in the visible expression of regional and universal unity there developed conciliar and primatial aspects of this episcope: it believes that this was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Commission is able to agree that for more than historical reasons the restoration of visible unity requires these two complementary aspects of episcope to be realised universally.



At a different level, that of historical development, the Commission agrees that in any future union such a universal primacy should be appropriately exercised by the See of Rome (cf. Venice 23).

The Commission does not therefore say that what has evolved historically or what is currently practised by the Roman See are necessarily 'normative': only that visible unity requires the realisation of a "general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of episcopate" in the service of the universal "koinonia of the Churches". Indeed much past Anglican objection has been directed against the manner of the exercise and the particular claims of the Roman Primacy rather than against universal primacy as such, for Anglicanism knows forms of primacy within its own experience. Not least among these is the developing role of the Archbishop of Canterbury within the Anglican Communion since the calling of the first Lambeth Conference. This illustrates a particular relationship between conciliarity and primacy in the service of the unity of the Anglican Communion.

(Further paragraphs on 'historical and theological development' to answer underlying Anglican and R.C. criticisms).