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ARCIC 237/Authority Elucidations/1.

Liverpool

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH: AN ELUCIDATION

1. 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 of the statement that the bishop 'can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity'.

Underlying many reactions to the Venice Statement is a degree of uneasiness as to whether insufficient attention is paid to the primary authority of Scripture, so that certain historical developments are given an authority comparable to that of Scripture.

There have been further questions concerning the normative nature of history in relation to doctrine. For example, 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. Again, it has been asked whether belief in the 'indefectibility' of the Church and 'doctrinal development' imply an automatic ratification of the past.

There has been a request for a clearer definition of 'indefectibility' and 'infallibility', and for a more exact distinction to be drawn between them.

It has been asked whether the criteria for deciding if a council is ecumenical include the subsequent reception by the Church as a whole. 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 Thirty Nine Articles of Religion.

Some questions have been asked about the status of regional primacies - for example, the patriarchal office as exercised in the Eastern Churches, and the office of metropolitan in the West.

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 <sup>necessary to go further and</sup> ~~more important~~ to elucidate the basic issues that underlie them. In all that we say we take for granted the basic principles that Christian faith depends on divine revelation and that the Holy Spirit guides the Church in the communication of revealed truth.

2. Koinonia

Critics of the Venice document maintain that there is too much stress upon the external manifestation of koinonia, and consequently an over-emphasis upon the ordained ministry to the neglect of the laity.

The spiritual aspect of koinonia has never been a matter of disagreement between our two communions. Yet the Church as koinonia is not only the inner reality of the union of all Christians with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, but also its visible expression. This ~~is~~ <sup>needs</sup> realized by a common faith, mutual love and a shared sacramental life.

3. The Place of the Laity

In guarding and developing this communion, every member has a part to play. Baptism gives everyone in the Church the right, and consequently the ability, to carry out his particular function in the body. The recognition of this fundamental right is of great importance. In different ways, even if sometimes hesitantly, our two churches have sought to integrate those who are not ordained in decision-making.

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 de-valuing of the role of the laity. <sup>proper and active</sup> 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).