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ARCIC 246/Primacy and History/2

PRIMACY AND HISTORY

8. It has been alleged that the Commission commends the primacy of the Roman See solely on the basis of history. But the Commission's argument is more than historical (cf. para. 23).

The unity in truth of the Christian community demands visible expression. We agree ^{that} ~~in seeing~~ such visible expression, therefore, as the will of God, and that the maintenance of visible unity requires episcopate. This is a doctrinal argument about the nature of Church order. But the way episcopate is realised concretely in ecclesial life (the balance fluctuating between conciliarity and primacy) will depend upon contingent historical factors and upon development under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Though it is possible to conceive a universal primacy located elsewhere than in the city of Rome, the original witness of Peter and Paul and the continuing exercise of a universal episcopate by the See of Rome present a unique presumption in its favour. Therefore, while to locate a universal primacy in the See of Rome is an affirmation at a different level from the assertion of the necessity for a universal primacy, it cannot be dissociated from the providential action of the Holy Spirit.

The design of God through the Holy Spirit has, we believe, been to preserve at once the fruitful diversity within the koinonia of local churches and the unity in essentials which must mark the universal koinonia. The history of our separation has underlined and continues to underline the necessity for this proper theological balance, which has often been distorted or destroyed by human failings or other historical factors (cf para.22).

The Commission does not therefore say that what has evolved

historically or what is currently practised by the Roman See is 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 Anglican objection has been directed against the manner of the exercise and particular claims of the Roman Primacy rather than against universal primacy as such.

Anglicanism has never rejected the principle and practice of primacy. New reflection upon it has been stimulated by the evolving role of the Archbishop of Canterbury within the Anglican Communion. The development of this form of primacy arose precisely from the need for a service of unity in the faith in an expanding Communion of churches. It finds expression in successive Lambeth Conferences, which originated with the request from two Provinces in a matter of faith. This illustrates a particular relationship between conciliarity and primacy in the Anglican Communion.

The Commission has already pointed to the possibilities of mutual benefit and reform which should arise from a shared recognition of one universal primacy which does not inhibit conciliarity - a 'prospect (which) should be met with faith, not fear' (Co-Chairmen's Preface ~~to the Venice Statement~~). Anglicans sometimes fear the prospect of over centralization, Roman Catholics the prospect of doctrinal incoherence. Faith, banishing fear, might see simply the prospect of the right balance between a primacy serving the unity and a conciliarity maintaining the just diversity of the koinonia of all the Churches.