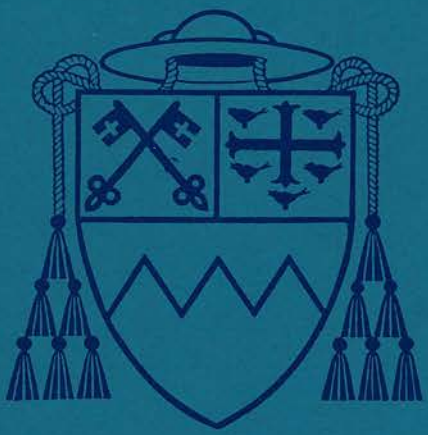
THE AMPLEFORTH JOURNAL



SPRING 1978 Vol. LXXXIII PART I

ARCIC ON CHURCH AUTHORITY

THE 1976 VENICE AGREED STATEMENT ON 'AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH', TWO COMMENTS

by

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You may say in your heart, 'How are we to know what word was not spoken by the Lord?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the thing does not happen and the word is not fulfilled, then it has not been spoken by the Lord. The prophet has spoken with presumption: you have nothing to fear from him.

Deuteronomy 18:21—22

The Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission embodies the centre of the dialogue between the two great Churches. It is a dialogue conducted for the furtherance of unity or, to coin Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher's phrase, 'full communion'. Although it is not a multi-Church negotiation but a dialogue between two Churches only, it embraces on the one hand the whole Anglican Communion (some 23 provinces throughout the world, over which the Archbishop of Canterbury has no more than a 'primacy of honour'), with signators from Ireland, Brisbane, Pretoria, Toronto and West Missouri as well as the Church in the United Kingdom; and on the other hand the world-wide Church of Rome, with its 600 million members and its 120 elective Cardinals. Thus it involves two Churches with commitments all over the world, both of whose relations with the Orthodox Church are particularly warm, two Churches already very close to one another—being, as Pope Paul said at the 1970 Canonisation, one a *sorella chiesa* of the other, sisters.

The Vatican Curia has well realised, not without trepidation on occasions and fear for the pace of advance, that the work of ARCIC for ecumenism has been the most farreaching and least retractable since the Council; for it has been in the dogmatic/doctrinal order, and so has established irreversible ground gained. Good will, social concord, diminishing suspicion and growing familiarity, these can be as a morning mist that evaporates when a new pharaoh arises who knows not the face of Joseph; but doctrinal ground gained is ground never again surrendered. That is the measure of the three Agreed Statements of Windsor (cf Rt Rev Alan Clark, JOURNAL, Aut 1972), Canterbury (cf an ARCIC signator, JOURNAL, Spr 1974) and Venice (cf two ARCIC signators, below). Moreover the subjects have composed a strategy of investigation that has proven the best in the circumstances and the most centrally fruitful for the future—many seemingly intractable problems being left to wither in face of new insight. The Statement on the Eucharist was an act of reconciliation, on the Ministry an act of recognition, and this last on Authority an act of revendication: admittedly it has been the least absolute in its resolution of the problems involved, but that is not to say that it was the less successful. After all it was left in third place as the high peak of the long climb, the other Statements furnishing the approach march. Nevertheless, there are for the first time matters left admittedly unresolved and it is conceded that the nature of the promulgated document is more interim than were the two former ones. ARCIC is at present engaged on the consideration of these still unresolved matters in the light of comments received from many sources, official and unofficial.

The Venice Statement was signed in September 1976 and published on 20th January 1977. It rests on an analysis of the Lordship of Christ, authority in scripture, relations between apostolic witness and preaching, and the authority of Church and Christian living. That issues in the implications of common faith and common action, local and universal leadership, collegiality and primacy. At the end of it lies Rome and the papacy: 'The Pope—as we all know—is undoubtedly the gravest obstacle in the path of ecumenism', said Paul VI in 1967. (It is interesting and timely that SPCK has just issued *A Pope for all Christians? An Inquiry into the Role of Peter in the Modern Church* by seven leading theologians each of a different confession). For all that, such great doctrinal convergence has been achieved that the ARCIC expects that what remains of difficulties can be resolved. Offering its three Statements as a corpus of convergent thought, the Commission now asks whether these do not expresss 'a unity at the level of faith which not only justifies but requires action to bring about a closer sharing between our two Communions in life, worship and mission'. So be it; *fiat, fiat!*

The long first paper below is by the former Master of Campion Hall, now theological Tutor there, who is a Doctor of Divinity in the University of Oxford after delivering the Sarum Lectures

on grace. The second paper is by the former Bishop of Pretoria, now the Archdeacon of Westminster Abbey to whom is entrusted by the Dean and Chapter particular responsibility for the 23 parishes in England of which they are patrons. Both were present for the fashioning of all three Agreed Statements and signed all of them.

A note is added on the Liverpool Archdiocesan Ecumenical two-day conference called to discuss the Venice Statement last autumn.

I. REV EDWARD YARNOLD, S.J.: VENICE, A ROMAN CATHOLIC ANALYSIS

It is now more than a year since the Venice Statement was published and it might well be felt that there was no need to add to the large number of articles written on it. However, I am glad to be able to take the opportunity to do so, partly because the impression is given that many commentators have not fully grasped the shape of the argument, partly in order to answer criticisms that have been made. I propose therefore to discuss first the justification of papal primacy made in the document, before considering some of these objections.

1. *The argument for papal primacy*

The argument is based on the principle that it is 'intrinsic to the Church's structure according to the mandate given by Christ' that there should be an ordained ministry 'for preserving and promoting the integrity of the *koinonia* in order to further the Church's response to the Lordship of Christ and its commitment to mission' (V5).[1] This principle had already been enunciated in the Canterbury Statement on Ministry, where it is applied not only to the ordained, but to 'all Christian ministry, whose purpose is always to build up the community' (C3; cf 5). The Church is a 'community of reconciliation' (C4); and 'like any human community the Church requires a form of leadership and unity, which the Holy Spirit provides in the ordained ministry' (C7).

This conception of the Church is based on St Paul's vision of the individual parts of Christ's body contributing to the welfare of the whole, and to his understanding that the gifts (such as the charisma of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) which God gives to each are 'for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (Eph 4:12).

Thus ordained ministry serves the community of Christ's followers. This fundamental statement carries several important implications. First, the ordained ministry is an essential part of the Church; it is not a human invention but 'part of God's design for his people' (C6) according to Christ's mandate (V5). Secondly, the authority of ordained ministers is an authority not of might or honour, but of service, like the authority of Christ who 'came not to be served but to serve' (Mk 10:45). Thirdly, the minister should not take solely upon himself responsibilities which should be undertaken by the whole community which he serves.

This last principle is sometimes called the principle of subsidiarity. This is a term which is used in Catholic social teaching to express the fact that the state should not take over responsibilities of individual citizens and families, but exists to provide the conditions necessary for them to fulfil these responsibilities. Thus in opposition to totalitarian theorists who make the State an end in itself, the Catholic teaching maintains that the State's purpose is subsidiary or supportive. The principle of subsidiarity is formulated in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931): 'just as it is wrong to withdraw from the individual and commit to the

[1] The following abbreviations are used in this article: C = *Ministry and Ordination: a Statement on the Doctrine of the Ministry by the Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission* (the Canterbury Statement), SPCK 1973. V = *Authority in the Church, agreed by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission* (the Venice Statement), SPCK/CTS 1977. LG = *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican II. DS = *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, ed H. Denzinger and A.Schönmetzer, 33rd ed, Herder 1965.

community at large what private enterprise and industry can accomplish, so too it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order for a larger and higher organization to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower bodies . . . Of its very nature the true aim of all social activity should be to help individual members of the social body, but never to destroy or absorb them.'[2] In 1946, in an address to the newly appointed cardinals, Pius XII took these words of his predecessor and applied them to the Church: 'Truly luminous words, which are valid for social life at every level, and also for the life of the Church, without prejudice to its hierarchical structure.'[3]

This principle of ordained ministry serving the body of Christ operates at every level in the Church, but the fundamental unit is the local Church or diocese under the bishop. It is the bishops who, in the words of Vatican I, 'being established by the Holy Spirit are the successors of the Apostles' and 'as true shepherds pasture and direct the flocks that have been entrusted to each' (DS 3061). Parishes are sub-divisions of dioceses; parish priests exercise authority in their parish as delegates of the bishop, receive from him the responsibility to lead the people in worship, especially the Mass, and it is by virtue of faculties received from him that they pronounce absolution in the sacrament of penance. It is true that most modern dioceses are so large that close contact between the people and the bishop is impossible, and it is the parish priest and the parish that is the practical centre of Christian life much more than the bishop and the diocese. But however large the diocese the bishop can normally keep his relationship with his people alive by occasional visits, when he can preside over the people's Mass and celebrate confirmation, by letters, and by maintaining close links with the parish clergy.

Just as the family is the basic unit of the State, the diocese is the basic unit of the Church. It is at this level that the pattern of ordained ministry serving the fellowship of the people in the service of Christ exists (or ought to exist) in its basic form, at this level too that it can be most readily seen to be 'intrinsic to the Church's structure'. Two complementary elements are implied. On the one hand there is the people seeking to be faithful to the word of God in their belief, in their worship, and in their lives; on the other hand there is the bishop (and under him the priests and deacons), unifying and directing this energetic response by the people to God's call. 'It is the role of the minister to co-ordinate the activities of the Church's fellowship and to promote what is necessary and useful for the Church's life and mission. He is to discern what is of the Spirit in the diversity of the Church's life and promote its unity' (C7). 'This pastoral authority belongs primarily to the bishop, who is responsible for preserving and promoting the integrity of the *koinonia* in order to further the Church's response to the Lordship of Christ and its commitment to mission' (V5).

The pastoral authority of the bishop is not only a right to be listened to with respect, nor does it in the last resort depend upon the bishop's personal qualities of wisdom and goodness, though it is a grave defect in the Church when there is a total divorce of charism from office. Like the scribes and pharisees who sit on the chair of Moses, the bishop must be obeyed: 'he can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its daily life' (V5). This does not imply that the sole channel by which God communicates truth is through the bishops to the people. As Newman saw so plainly, the faithful can sometimes perceive the truth more clearly than their ordained leaders. It is the bishop's responsibility 'to discern these insights and give authoritative expression to them' (V6), but he remains part of the community in its search for God's truth. The

[2] Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, n80 (CTS trans).

[3] *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 38 (1946), p.145. Cf H. Küng, *Structures of the Church*, Burns and Oates 1965, p.215—6.

community in its turn 'must respond to and assess the insights and teaching of the ordained ministers'; there is thus a 'continuing process of discernment and response' (ibid).

Thus a new factor enters into the equation. Pastoral authority exists for the service of the community of the faithful; but in proclaiming the truth he is not like a schoolmaster teaching boys a subject of which they know nothing, but rather the spokesman articulating in authoritative form the, perhaps inarticulate, mind of the faithful. 'You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know', St John told his people; 'you have no need that anyone should teach you' (1 Jn 2:20, 27). Referring to this passage, the Decree on the Church of Vatican II declared: 'The body of the faithful as a whole . . . cannot err in matters of belief' (LG 12). Thus it would be a mistake to regard the bishops as the teaching Church (*ecclesia docens*) and the laity as the learning Church (*ecclesia discens*); there are elements of learning and teaching on both sides.

I have developed this account of the local Church at considerable length, because it is the basis of the argument of the Venice Statement. The essential factors are these: (1) *koinonia*, the fellowship of the local Church, served by (2) *episcope*, i.e. the pastoral authority of the ordained minister (primarily the bishop), (3) who acts in a *subsidiary role*, (4) articulating, discerning and, if necessary, prompting, rather than regimenting, though when necessary 'requiring compliance'. This mutual interaction of pastor and people is sometimes referred to as *co-responsibility*.

The care of the bishop, however, is not only that of a pastor of his local Church. He is the one who has the responsibility of ensuring that his Church is in communion with other Churches. 'The bishop expresses this unity of his Church with the others: this is symbolized by the participation of several bishops in his ordination' (V8). Consequently the same four components of the pattern of authority that we traced in the fellowship of individual Christians in the local Church are also evident in the fellowship of local Churches one with another. This is true first of all at the regional level. The local Churches, in the person of their bishops, frequently meet in regional synods or bishops' conferences, by which the Church 'formulates its rule of faith and orders its life' (V9). In this synodical or conciliar authority we see an expression of the *koinonia* of the Churches. But in addition there soon developed another organ of authority for the promotion of this fellowship of the Churches of a region: among these Churches the bishop of the most prominent see was often granted a primacy over the rest. The Council of Nicaea (325) stated that Rome, Alexandria and Antioch had according to 'ancient customs' authority (*exousia*) over other Churches in their neighbourhood, and seemed to envisage also a lower level at which other metropolitan sees (presumably in the cities which were centres of civil government) had a measure of authority over the surrounding dioceses (canon 6).[4] Here we have *episcope* serving the *koinonia*, not of individuals but of Churches. The principle of *subsidiarity* applies, because conciliar authority, 'far from being an imposition, is designed to strengthen the life and mission of the local Churches and of their members' (V9); similarly the purpose of primatial sees is 'to keep the Churches faithful to the will of Christ' (V10), 'to

[4] *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Istituto per le Scienze Religione, Bologna 1973, p.8—9. When speaking of the regional primacy held by the bishops of prominent sees the Commission was giving special consideration to the patriarchal system still in force in the Orthodox Churches. The more usual Roman Catholic pattern today is to have an elected president of a national bishops' conference rather than to attach the presidency to a particular see, though within provinces the metropolitan system continues. [Thus the Cardinal of Westminster was the previous President of the Conference of the Bishops of England & Wales, and the Archbishop of Birmingham has succeeded him.]

assist the bishops to promote in their Churches right teaching, holiness of life, brotherly unity, and the Church's mission to the world' (V11). The Statement speaks expressly of the primate's *co-responsibility* with all the bishops of the region: 'for every bishop receives at ordination . . . the obligation to maintain it [his local Church] in living awareness and practical service of the other Churches' (V10). As at the local level, the authority in question has power to call for obedience: this is affirmed expressly of the synod (V9), and hinted with extreme delicacy of the primate (V11). In one important respect, however, this pattern of authority differs at the local and regional levels: within the diocese it is said, as we have seen, to be 'intrinsic to the Church's structure according to the mandate given by Christ' (V5); at the regional level the Statement claims no more for the systems of synodical and primatial government than that they are historical developments which the Church has adopted as the best method of fulfilling her mission.

The Statement proceeds to trace this same pattern of primacy and conciliarity at the universal level. Beginning with Nicaea in 325, there have been held a series of ecumenical or general councils, so that all the local Churches may be united in their response to particular challenges. With regard to universal primacy, 'it is within the context of this historical development [of regional primacies] that the see of Rome, whose prominence was associated with the death there of Peter and Paul, eventually became the principal centre in matters concerning the Church universal' (V12).

In its origins, at least, the motive was not imperialistic: 'far from overriding the authority of the bishops in their own dioceses, this service was explicitly intended to support them in their ministry of oversight' (V12). Despite frequent shortcomings in practice, 'the primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his oversight in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the Churches to Christ and one another' (V12). Here we have once more *episcope* serving the *koinonia* in a subsidiary role. (This is no new doctrine: Vatican I stated that the purpose of papal primacy was the unity of the Church [DS 3051].) Again, the universal primacy is not an autocratic system, but is intended to be exercised with the co-responsibility of the other bishops and all the local Churches: the definition of papal infallibility at Vatican I laid down rigorous conditions precluding the idea that 'the pope . . . can speak independently of his fellow bishops and the Church' (V24c).

We saw above that the Statement, declining to affirm that the primatial system is intrinsic to the Church's structure at the regional level, limits itself to recording the evolution of such primacy as a historical fact. It is of greatest significance that the Statement is able to assert much more of universal primacy. 'If God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, this general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episcope* serving the *koinonia* of the Churches *needs* [italics mine] to be realized at the universal level' (V23). This comes close to saying that universal primacy is intrinsic to the Church's structure—but only a universal primacy truly serving the *koinonia* of Churches, and complemented by conciliar authority. It is not said, however, that it is necessary that this primacy should be held by the bishop of Rome. What is asserted is that 'the only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such *episcope* is the see of Rome', so that it is 'appropriate' that universal primacy in a united Church should be held by that see (V23). It is not generally recognised that the definition of papal primacy at Vatican I implies a similar distinction. It is there defined that it is 'by the institution of Christ the Lord himself or by divine right that St Peter should have perpetual successors in his primacy over the whole Church'; but that the bishops of Rome are these successors is stated

as a fact, but not said to be of dominical institution or divine right (DS 3058; cf 3057).[5]

To sum up this section of the Venice Statement, the argument begins with the affirmation that the pattern, which I have interpreted as a fourfold pattern of *koinonia* served by *episcope* according to the principles of subsidiarity and co-responsibility, is intrinsic to the Church's structure at the local level, and came in the course of history to be applied at the regional and universal levels; at the universal level it can also be said to be necessary for the fulfilment of God's will. It is evident that this argument proceeds not by strict deductive logic but by analogy—granted that the pattern is essential at the local level, it will be no less essential at the universal—and by an appeal to history which presupposes trust in providence and in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide the Church. All depends on the initial premiss of the *need* for this interplay of primacy and conciliarity. As presented in C 3—5, and more briefly in V 5, this premiss is based on scripture (though not many texts are explicitly cited), not as a logical deduction from a text or texts, but as a statement of the way the Church has come to apply scripture in practice. Such an argument is neither deductive nor inductive but might be called eductive; its presupposition is that the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of scripture also guides the Church in drawing a meaning out of scripture. (This eductive method is followed even by people who think themselves fundamentalists, for even they, in applying scripture to modern needs, follow a particular tradition of interpretation, selection and emphasis).

At every level this fourfold pattern of authority is exercised, among other ways, in the expression and application of the truths of the gospel. At the local level the bishop and his ordained co-operators listen to, discern and define the local Church's faith in the light of the faith of the universal Church. Regional and general councils listen to the bishops testifying each to the faith of his Church, and are thus able to discern and define the faith of the regional or universal Church. The regional or universal primate is involved in this process as the head of the council; he may however sometimes need to proclaim the faith of the Church without activating the complicated machinery of a council. In such circumstances he does not speak for himself but as the authentic spokesman of the faith of the regional or universal Church.

The Church, in proclaiming the gospel possesses Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit will lead it into all truth (Jn 16:13). This is not to say that bishops, councils and even popes never make mistakes. But the Holy Spirit can prevail despite human failures. 'We are confident that such failures cannot destroy the Church's ability to proclaim the gospel and to show forth the Christian life . . . That is why the Church, in spite of its failures, can be described as indefectible' (V18). But not only does the Holy Spirit have his way *despite* human error. 'When the Church meets in ecumenical council,' the Statement affirms, 'its decisions on fundamental matters of faith *exclude* [italics mine] what is erroneous. Through the Holy Spirit the Church commits itself to these judgements, recognizing that, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with Tradition, they are by the same Spirit protected from error' (V19). To this protection from error the term 'infallibility' is applied (V24c, note).

This agreement on the infallibility of general councils has come as a surprise to many, who remember that the twenty-first of the XXXIX Articles

[5] Cf my article 'The Charism of Providential Teaching', *The Month*, Nov 1971, p.132—3. The formulation of the Anglican objection in V24b, 'The First Vatican Council of 1870 uses the language of "divine right" of the successors of Peter', is consequently accurate; it would not however have been correct to say that the Council uses the language of divine right concerning the Bishop of Rome.

said of general councils, '(forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and Word of God,) they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God'. This is one of the reasons why some Anglican critics, such as Bishop Montefiore[6] and Professor Lampe[7], have found this part of the statement unsatisfactory. However, even apart from the fact that Anglicans are not committed to the acceptance of every clause of the Articles, this affirmation that general councils are not immune from human weakness need not be taken as the denial of the infallibility of general councils in the sense put forward in the Venice Statement. As E. J. Bicknell's respected commentary on the Articles points out, 'we must balance the language of the Article by the language of the Reformers elsewhere . . . In a closely parallel passage the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* [probably composed by the authors of the original form of the Articles], speaking of the four General Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon, writes *magna cum reverentia amplectimur et suscipimus* ["we embrace and receive them with great reverence"]. So one of the Homilies speaks of Six Councils as "received of all men".' In Bicknell's opinion the authors of Article XXI 'had in mind not the great General Councils of the past, whose decisions they accepted with all reverence, but the Council then sitting at Trent.'[8] Dr Henry Chadwick, a member of ARCIC, is consequently able to reconcile the Venice Statement with Article XXI in the following way:

> 'It is a mistake to quote this famous sentence [of Article XXI] as if it were one that no Roman Catholic or Orthodox theologian could conceivably agree to. To Cardinal Bellarmine it would have seemed a self-evident proposition. Ancient Church history offers classical instances: Ariminum (359), Ephesus (449), the iconoclast council of 754, possessed the juridical apparatus and public title of ecumenicity. But their claims were not received by the Church. Bellarmine could conveniently say that an ecumenical council is to be accepted as secure when and in so far as it has received papal ratification. In the measure to which Roman confirmation is a vital part of the process of reception by the faithful, through which the decisions of a council gain recognition in the universal Church, this is not a proposition inherently offensive to an Anglican.'[9]

To put it another way, the teaching of the Article that general councils *may* err does not imply that they always err, and so does not contradict the Venice affirmation that general councils are in certain circumstances 'protected from error'. Any area of contention concerns the way in which a particular statement of a particular general council can be *known* to be protected from error. Traditionally Roman Catholics have relied on recognisable canonical criteria. Some of these are listed in the Decree on the Church of Vatican II: 'assembled in an ecumenical council, they are, for the universal Church, teachers of and judges in matters of faith and morals, whose decisions must be adhered to with the loyal and obedient assent of faith' (LG 25). 'The college or body of bishops has for all that no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head' (LG 22). Anglicans, on the other hand, and Orthodox too, tend to regard subsequent reception by the Church as the essential factor.

[6] 'Authority in the Church', *Theology*, May 1977, p.163—70.

[7] 'Authority in the Church: a Speech in the Synod in February 1977', *Theology*, Sept 1977, p.362—5.

[8] E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*, 3rd ed rev H. J. Carpenter, Longmans Green 1955, p.270.

[9] H. Chadwick, 'A Brief Apology for "Authority in the Church"', *Theology*, Sept 1977, p.329—30. Roman Catholic ecclesiology conceives the Pope's role as that of the head of the defining council, rather than as that of the representative of the Church receiving the definition *post factum*.

This does not necessarily imply it is this subsequent reception which gives conciliar definitions canonical validity; reception may be one of the indications which *shows* them to have been valid all along, rather than the factor which *makes* valid definitions out of propositions which up till then had been merely recommendations proposed for the Church's acceptance. Catholic ecclesiology, being committed to the belief that infallible teaching authority belongs already to the general council, has tended to ignore the need for subsequent acceptance by the Church. Yet its importance is implied, even if not directly stated, in Vatican II's Decree on the Church: the proposition that 'the assent of the Church can never be lacking to such definitions on account of the same Holy Spirit's influence, through which Christ's whole flock is maintained in the unity of the faith and makes progress in it' (LG 25) entails the corollary that if that assent is lacking, the proposition in question was not properly defined in the first place.

There have been clear occasions in the past when it was only in the light of subsequent reception that a conciliar definition was seen to be such. Thus the First Council of Constantinople (381) was attended only by bishops of the Eastern Church, but it achieved subsequent recognition as an ecumenical council, and its creed and canons were held to be binding; on the other hand the heretical councils referred to by Dr Chadwick in the passage quoted above, as far as membership was concerned, had more claim to ecumenical status but they failed to achieve recognition by the Church. Nowadays, it is true, subsequent recognition is not normally needed to establish the ecumenicity of a council, but it is relevant to the establishment of the status of particular decrees as articles of faith. Thus the bishops at Trent would probably have considered the affirmation that the whole human race was included in the fall of the first human couple to be an integral part of their definitions of the doctrine of original sin, but the Church has come to receive the doctrine in a different sense, regarding it legitimate to separate the dogma of original sin from the Adamic myth in which it is clothed.

The Venice Statement sides unambiguously with this Catholic theory that fundamental dogmatic definitions of a council are infallible in themselves, subsequent acceptance being a criterion, not a constituent, of this infallibility. But many Anglicans, while taking up a position which *in practice* differs little from this, instinctively adopt a *theory* which makes the subsequent recognition by the Church the decisive event.

Thus the Venice Statement sees primacy and conciliarity as complementary aspects of the fulfilment of the Church's duty to proclaim and apply the gospel. When the primate declares the faith on behalf of his Church, he must follow a fourfold pattern of *episcope* serving the *koinonia*, according to the principle of subsidiarity and co-responsibility. He should therefore help his Church to recognise the truth of what he proclaims as something already familiar to them, though perhaps in different terms. It is the regional primate's duty, among other things 'to assist the bishops to promote in their churches right teaching' and 'to reach a common mind' (V11). As the Church needs the same complementarity of primacy and conciliarity at the universal as well as at the regional level (V23), it follows (though the Statement does not make the inference explicit) that the universal primate has the duty to assist the bishops of the universal Church to promote right teaching and to reach a common mind. Though there may be less formal occasions on which the universal primate will discharge these responsibilities, he discharges them most solemnly when a general council under his presidency defines fundamental doctrine, or when, without calling a council, he himself explicitly articulates the mind of the Church in such a definition. The Commission was able to speak of such conciliar definitions as infallible; to reach agreement concerning the infallibility of

papal definitions would require much bold theological thinking for which perhaps neither Church is yet ready.

II. *Criticisms of the Statement*

I cannot hope to provide a comprehensive survey of the many criticisms of the Statement that have been made. Some concern matters of substance; others look very like straining for gnats. My impression is that more criticisms have been made on the Anglican than the Roman Catholic side, and that among the Anglican critics the most prominent have been, not the conservative Evangelicals who were the leading opponents of the Windsor and Canterbury Statements, but a number of theologians sharing a viewpoint which might be labelled liberal. They whole-heartedly support the Commission's search for unity, but, being strongly attached to the principle of pluriformity, have little sympathy with the attempt to formulate careful agreed statements of doctrine (described as 'monolithic doctrinal confessions'), and seem to see in such divergence of belief no obstacle to immediate 'full . . . intercommunion'.[10]

The Anglican journal *Theology* has published a number of criticisms of the Statement from the liberal point of view. Those by Bishop Montefiore and Professor Lampe have already been mentioned; some letters have been published to the same effect, and a similar line is taken in an editorial. It is Bishop Montefiore who voices the most thorough-going liberal reaction: quoting the Statement's remark that 'in both our traditions the appeal to Scripture, to the creeds, to the Fathers, and to the definitions of the councils of the early Church is considered basic and normative' (V18, where a footnote is appended stating, 'This is emphasized in the Anglican tradition.'), the Bishop comments: 'This seems rather a lot of luggage to carry around at a time when one would have thought it prudent to travel light'[11] Professor Lampe, in similar vein, concludes that the Statement is 'a failure', because 'it isn't about authority in the Church; it's about who exercises it. The great prior theological question is, what is the nature of authority, especially in matters of belief? What is its source? What do we mean by revelation? What is the relation of revelation to doctrine? These and similar questions are the great divisive issue today which sometimes makes liberal Christianity and authoritarian Christianity almost like two different religions.'[12] The Professor, however, does less than justice to the Statement here; sections 1—3 and 13—15 do attempt to answer, although compactly, the questions he asks, though the answers can hardly be to his liking, for the Statement seems to come down squarely on what he somewhat tendentiously calls the 'authoritarian' side of the divide—if, that is, the formula of *episcope* serving *koinonia* with regard to subsidiarity and co-responsibility is to be considered illiberal. But that there is a divide seems certain. Perhaps, as Dr Chadwick points out in an answer to Bishop Montefiore, the real divide is not so much that between liberals and authoritarians, as that between those who take account of 'the Holy Spirit's living presence and continued activity within the community of God's people in time and space' and those who do not.[13] It might, however, be truer to the facts to speak of three camps, not two. First there are the liberals who hold that defined dogmas and statements in creeds may be simply wrong and therefore discarded. Secondly come the conservatives (such as Archbishop Lefebvre) who think that such formulae have a transcultural and transhistorical value, as if they expressed the truth in concepts which suited all future situations. But there is also the middle position of the Venice Statement, that dogmatic formulae, being the prophetic restatement of

[10] G. Lampe, op cit, p.365.
[11] H. Montefiore, op cit p.167.
[12] G. Lampe, op cit p.362.
[13] H. Chadwick, op cit p.327.

the words of the gospel 'in order that the hearers in their situation may understand and respond to them', may need subsequent restatement if 'the categories of thought and the mode of expression' become 'superseded'; but 'restatement always builds upon, and does not contradict, the truth intended by the original definition' (15). This theory of consistency of development implies the existence of criteria of consistency, the fundamental one being the Church's own assessment—which would be a circular logical process, if one did not believe in the power of the Spirit to preserve the Church in the truth.

Bishop Montefiore also rejects the notion that the bishop 'can require the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity in its [the community's] daily life' (V5). He quotes the Lambeth Conference of 1920: 'We greatly desire that the office of a bishop should everywhere be exercised in a representative and constitutional manner[14]. Returning to the subject in a later letter, the Bishop writes: '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.'[15] But is the Anglican tradition really inconsistent with the interplay of *episcope, koinonia,* subsidiarity and co-responsibility which ARCIC upholds? Professor Lampe does not seem to think so: 'The Roman primacy,' he writes, 'is set out in these earlier paragraphs [V1—18] in a form which we could all accept' (though he goes on to reject papal infallibility and universal immediate jurisdiction).[16]

Another criticism that has been made in more than one quarter concerns the four problems expressed in V24. They are, of course, Anglican objections to papal claims, not necessarily objections which the Anglican members of ARCIC felt to be unanswerable, but rather objections which they felt a substantial number of Anglicans would want to see expressed. They concern the interpretation of the Petrine texts, the question of the 'divine right' of the Pope, papal infallibility and universal immediate jurisdiction. In each instance a very brief reply is added, designed to show that the gulf between the Anglican and the Roman position is not as great as these objections envisage. Professor Lampe, however, believes that these problems 'are very much the nub of the whole question . . . of primacy. That is why I wish the Commission had not submitted its report to the Churches until it had made some progress with these vitally important issues'.[17] In fact the Commission is currently working on a fuller treatment of these four points; but it believes that the agreement already reached 'represents a significant convergence with far-reaching consequences' (V25), which justified publication even of what Professor Lampe calls 'unfinished business'.

Perhaps the most important criticism concerns the gulf between theory and practice. Primacy is not always balanced by conciliarity; bishops do not always act with regard for subsidiarity and co-responsibility; too often they do too much teaching and not enough listening. The Commission was, of course, aware of this inconsistency between ideal and practice. In the words of the Co-Chairmen's Preface to the Statement: 'There is much in the document . . . which presents the ideal of the Church as willed by Christ. History shows how the Church has often failed to achieve this ideal.' That scandals come is no surprise. But the greater the failure the weaker the Statement's argument. If primacy does not have the beneficial effects claimed, does it not follow that there is something wrong with the Commission's thinking? So Free Churchmen question whether episcopacy, and Anglicans, whether universal primacy, have in fact promoted *koinonia* in the Church. The effective answer must be pragmatic,

[14] H. Montefiore, op cit p.165.
[15] *Theology,* Sept 1977, p.369.
[16] G. Lampe, op cit p.363.
[17] Ibid, p.364—5.

the same answer as that given to aspirations for a united Ireland: make your polity work so effectively and attractively that the others will want to have a part in it.

There is much talk about the non-theological factors that contribute to the division of Churches. That there are some (like unemployment in Northern Ireland) is unquestionable. But some factors which seem at first sight non-theological, such as the mysterious bureaucratic procedures of the Vatican, turn out to be theological, because they are practical disproofs of the value of papal primacy. Even theological obstacles to reunion need to be charmed as well as reasoned away.[18]

II. RT REV EDWARD KNAPP-FISHER: VENICE, AN ANGLICAN VIEW

Those of us who are actively engaged in seeking the visible unity of Christ's Church according to His will believe that it is only through dialogue with Christians of other traditions that we can together be drawn into a deeper understanding of Christ and His Gospel than any of us could attain in isolation. This requires us to accept the principle of what has been called *ecclesiological contributionism*—the sharing of all those particular insights into truth which each Church has been enabled to preserve. A fear of many who are not Roman Catholics that the Roman Catholic Church conceives of unity in terms of total absorption has been largely dispelled by the Second Vatican Council.

Authority in the Church is one of the matters in which there has been divergence in theory and practice between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. On this matter as on others, the members of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission have recognized that they have much to learn from one another. The production of the *Statement on Authority* represents a significant movement towards convergence as a result of the removal of some misapprehensions and the clarification of issues which have hitherto appeared to be insuperable obstacles to unity between us. Nevertheless some problems still remain to be resolved. Some of these are specified (para 24): others are none the less real for being more difficult to define and articulate.

In the past it has been the conviction of many Anglicans that Roman Catholic teaching about authority has been pressed beyond justifiable limits, insufficiently supported by the evidence of the Bible—that authority conceived in predominantly juridical terms has been distorted into authoritarianism. This widespread Anglican view is due only in part to ignorance or misunderstanding of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. Infallibility, for example, has been regarded by many Anglicans as a personal prerogative of the Pope rather than as an attribute of the whole Church, and the carefully defined restrictions formally regulating its exercise have been ignored.

But if Anglicans suppose that Roman Catholics have exaggerated the nature and scope of authority, Roman Catholics have been equally justified in thinking that Anglicans have so reduced it as to evacuate it of any real meaning. We have to acknowledge that we often appear to acquiesce in, and even condone, disobedience to principles of faith and morality to which in theory we are committed. A tendency to unchecked antinomianism and individualism represents the unacceptable face of Anglicanism; and we must acknowledge that the principle *conscientia semper sequenda* cannot be invoked in support of repudiation of authority by those who do little to ensure that their consciences are reasonably informed and instructed! The Report of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *Christian Believing* (SPCK, 1976), and essays

[18] For a fuller discussion of many other aspects of the Venice Statement, especially the Anglican difficulties of V24, the reader is referred to E. J. Yarnold and Henry Chadwick, *Truth and Authority*, CTS/SPCK 1977.

contributed by its individual members, demonstrate the need for Anglicans to tackle their still unresolved domestic problem of the permissible limits of doctrinal divergence within a Church truly united if they are to play an effective and responsible part in ecumenical affairs.

Since the Second Vatican Council authority has been a matter for debate within the Roman Catholic Church and traditional interpretations have been radically questioned by many of its members including theologians. There appears to be a real danger of the pendulum of reaction swinging too far, so that justifiable criticism of the manner in which authority has been understood and exercised could lead to the wholesale rejection of the concept which is apparent in many spheres of secular life. But a proper insistence on the importance of authority, duly recognized and responsibly exercised, in the life of the Church has always been one of the distinctive contributions which Roman Catholicism has to make to the universal Church. If this were to be lost, the whole Church would lose an element indispensable to its life, schisms would be multiplied instead of healed, and the disintegration of Christendom would be accelerated. Respect for authority is not inconsistent with an attitude of critical and constructive questioning; nor need it imply that those who exercise it, and the manner in which they do so, are infallible. A tendency to indulge in, for example, indiscriminate and unauthorized intercommunion may further undermine the unity which it is designed to promote. Members attending the meetings of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission regularly participate in one another's Eucharists without communicating together. They find this painful, and look forward to the time when it will be possible for them to do so. But they are unanimous in their conviction that full *communio in sacris* must express substantial doctrinal agreement, and that intercommunion will only be possible when it is reciprocal and authorized by their respective authorities.

This attitude of respect for ecclesial authority has guided and informed the members of the Commission as they have sought to be drawn together in a deeper understanding of the true nature and implications of authority, particularly as this relates to matters of faith, and the manner in which Christ wills His authority to be exercised in His Church. The Statement on *Authority in the Church* (1975) affirms that

> 'the inspired documents in which this [the Gospel of Jesus Christ through Whom God speaks to men] is related came to be accepted by the Church as a normative record of the authentic foundation of the faith'. (para 2)

It accepts the validity of the Vincentian principle[1] by stating that the interpretation and application of Scriptural truth must be tested and approved by the *koinonia*, the fellowship of the faithful, (although the application of this principle in a Church still divided presents considerable difficulties). Within the context of *koinonia*, authority is exercised in various modes of which two are distinguished as *conciliar* and *primatial* authority. (paras 19—23)

The authority of General Councils is accepted in principle by both our Churches although there is disagreement between us as to which Councils can be properly regarded as *general*, as Anglican critics of the Statement have been quick to point out. Anglicans reserve this designation to the early Councils of a still substantially undivided Church, and are reluctant to grant infallibility even to their decisions.[2] So there has been Anglican criticism of the assertion that 'When the Church meets in ecumenical council its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous.' (para 19). In this connexion two observations may be made.

[1] 'id quod ubique, semper et ab omnibus creditur'.

[2] *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*: 'General Councils . . . may err, and sometimes have erred . . .' (*Article XXI*).

First, a decision of a General Council is not authoritative *per se*: 'The confirmation by a great see, and in particular by Rome, is a vital part of reception [by the *koinonia*] which in antiquity was not understood as a merely juridical act of formal ratification.'[3]

Secondly, *Article 21* is not necessarily inconsistent with affirming that, irrespective of what has happened in the past, the decisions of a genuinely ecumenical council of the Church united according to Christ's will would be preserved from error.

Early in Christian history, and for largely historical reasons, it came to be generally acknowledged that a position of special importance attached to particular sees. Their primacy was subsequently accorded to their bishops; but it was not envisaged that the authority conferred upon them could or should be exercised by a bishop-primate in isolation. This is clearly affirmed by the Statement:

> 'The bishops are collectively responsible for defending and interpreting the apostolic faith. The primacy accorded to a bishop implies that, after consulting his fellow bishops, he may speak in their name and express their mind.' (para 20)

In both our Churches conciliar and primatial authority have been regarded not as mutually exclusive but as complementary. Anglicans have attached more importance to conciliarity, but recognize the primacy of metropolitans within their own Provinces, and accord a primacy of honour to the Archbishop of Canterbury in respect of the whole Anglican Communion. Many Anglicans would be prepared to accept the universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome as an indispensable element in the Church united according to God's will (para 23); but they could not accept such a universal primacy whose authority was understood and exercised as it has been in the past by the Pope. In particular, 'Anglicans find grave difficulty in the affirmation that the Pope can be infallible in his teaching', in spite of the fact that this doctrine 'is hedged round by very rigorous conditions laid down at the First Vatican Council' (para 24(c)). Further, 'The claim that the Pope possesses universal immediate jurisdiction, the limits of which are not clearly specified, is a source of anxiety to Anglicans' (para 24(d)). The exact relationship between primatial and conciliar authority needs to be more precisely defined, and this has been cogently argued in a recent article. 'But collegiality as proclaimed by Vatican II cannot be fully secure in its implementation until it is publicly recognized that the Pope cannot make such important decisions alone. That Popes do not normally act or define without consultation is an inadequate argument against reforming the Church's constitution on this point (i.e., the competence of a Pope, who could be heretical, to override a conciliar decision).'[4]

It seems reasonable to suppose that any mutually acceptable primacy would be invested with an authority greater than that accorded to the Archbishop of Canterbury within the Anglican Communion, but less than that accorded by the Roman Catholic Church to the Pope. The Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops, as it has evolved since Vatican II, could provide the context within which the authority of the universal primate could be defined and exercised, although Anglicans have reservations about the practice and procedure of that Synod at its present stage. The proper claims of conciliar and primatial authority would be recognized and reconciled if it were established that no pronouncement on matters of faith and morals could have binding force until both the Pope and the Synod had endorsed and promulgated it as a genuine and adequate expression of the *consensus fidelium*.

[3] E. J. Yarnold S.J., and Henry Chadwick, *Truth and Authority* (CTS/SPCK 1977) p.17.

[4] *The Tablet*, 10th December 1977 p.1174: 'Authority in the Church' by Antony Black. The whole article is a valuable contribution to this debate.

If the degree of agreement reached between members of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission expressed in their Statement on *Authority in the Church* is accepted, and its implications elaborated and applied by the authorities of our two Churches, the consequences will be far-reaching. These are admirably summarized by the Co-Chairman's preface to that document, and I cannot do better than conclude by quoting their words:

'The consensus we have reached, if it is to be accepted by our two communities, would have, we insist, important consequences. Common recognition of Roman primacy would bring changes not only to the Anglican Communion but also to the Roman Catholic Church. On both sides the readiness to learn, necessary to the achievement of such a wider *koinonia*, would demand humility and charity. The prospect should be met with faith, not fear. Communion with the see of Rome would bring to the Churches of the Anglican Communion not only a wider *koinonia* but also a strengthening of the power to realize its traditional ideal of diversity in unity. Roman Catholics, on their side, would be enriched by the presence of a particular tradition of spirituality and scholarship, the lack of which has deprived the Roman Catholic Church of a precious element in the Christian heritage. The Roman Catholic Church has much to learn from the Anglican synodical tradition of involving the laity in the life and mission of the Church. We are convinced, therefore, that our degree of agreement, which argues for greater communion between our Churches, can make a profound contribution to the witness of Christianity in our contemporary society.'

* * *

MERSEYSIDE ECUMENICAL GATHERING

Four of the Ampleforth brethren were among the 150 priests of the Liverpool Archdiocese who were invited by Archbishop Worlock to attend an Ecumenical Conference at Christ's College of Education with 150 Anglican clergy and 100 ministers of the Free Churches.

The Conference lasted for two days and the topic was 'Authority in the Church' based on a study of the document on the subject prepared by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). Three general sessions were devoted to comments on the document by representatives of the three groups present—Bishop Alan Clark of East Anglia, RC Co-Chairman of ARCIC gave the Catholic comment; the Rev Julian Charley, Anglican rector of a Liverpool parish and Anglican delegate to ARCIC gave the Anglican comment; and the Rev Michael Taylor, Principal of the Northern Baptist College, Manchester, gave a Free Church comment. There was no general discussion at these general sessions, but questions aiming at clarification of the comments were welcomed and answered by the speakers, or by Archbishop Worlock, or by David Sheppard, Anglican Bishop of Liverpool who were both present throughout the Conference.

Between the general sessions there were group discussions in about 25 groups of ten to a dozen each representing a broad cross-section of the Churches represented. The writer's group of twelve, chaired by a Methodist minister, included three Catholic parish priests, and among four Anglicans were a University chaplain, and the vicar of a team ministry in Toxteth, one of the areas of Liverpool most beset by problems of racial integration and underprivilege.

A list of suggested topics for discussion was provided, and this is appended below in full as the topics have obviously been chosen with considerable care to cover all aspects of ecumenical dialogue and may well serve as models for use in

discussion by other ecumenical groups. Some of the topics are theological in nature, some severely practical 'What kind of authority do we expect from those in positions of leadership in the Church?', and some refer to the conditions under which further progress towards unity might be promoted. In the event few groups seem to have had time to deal with more than two or three of the topics proposed. The groups were also encouraged to use their discussions to formulate questions to be submitted to a panel of Church leaders, assisted by the main speakers, at a final open forum on the second day.

The group discussions seem to have revealed in many cases quite a wide diversity of views among those who belonged to the same Church yet who were able to work harmoniously with each other in their ministry, and this perhaps gives grounds for hope that ecumenical discussions of this type may prove more fruitful than some of the pessimists would imagine. In fact at the final open forum it became clear that the participants at the Conference were nearly unanimous that it had been a valuable exercise. It was suggested that it should be repeated regularly, perhaps every year, and that in addition smaller conferences of a similar nature would be valuable in different areas of the Archdiocese.

The organisers had given much thought to the question of ecumenical prayer and worship during the Conference. In the end they rejected the idea of an ecumenical service and courageously decided to conclude the first day's programme with an Anglican Eucharistic Service celebrated in the neighbouring St Katherine's College of Education, attended by all the delegates of every persuasion, and to open the second day with a Catholic Mass for Christian Unity at Christ's College, again attended by all. They felt this was the most honest procedure, and the pain of attending each other's Eucharist without the possibility of inter-communion would emphasise the work for Christian Unity still to be done and be a spur to all in their efforts to achieve it. The Conference concluded with a short joint service of prayers, readings and hymns.

Topics for group discussions

1. What kind of authority do we expect from those in positions of leadership in the Church?
2. Do you regard primacy as essential to the Church's life; as a providential development of value; or as an unscriptural deviation?
3. To what extent does the problem of papal primacy hinder the work we are called to do together?
4. What effect do you think a growth in unity between Anglicans and Roman Catholics along the lines of 'Authority in the Church' will have on their relations with other Christians?
5. In what sense is Scripture normative for faith and conduct; and how does this bear upon our attitudes to creeds, conciliar statements, and tradition?
6. Is Christian agreement necessary, desirable, or possible?
7. Do you find the distinctions between 'ruling authority', 'intrinsic authority', and 'absolute authority' sensible and helpful?
8. On what grounds do you believe an opinion is entitled to respect? What measure of freedom can Christians allow each other in deciding on ethical matters such as birth control?
9. Should the Church ever claim that what it teaches is absolutely true or absolutely right?
10. Do you think that clergy have a vested interest in authority?
11. What doctrinal assurances do we require from each other to warrant any further steps towards full communion between our Churches?
12. What divisions between Christians most urgently need our attention?

W. T. L.