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“A GIFT TO BE SHARED”  
ANGLICANS AND CATHOLICS IN DIALOGUE ON PRIMACY:  
THE ARCIC’S ACHIEVEMENTS

The problem of authority in the Church is very complex. In general, we may distinguish two main lines of authority. The first one is the authority of the sources of teaching. They are the Scriptures, Tradition, Magisterial teaching, community of the faithful and individual conscience. The second line may be described as the authority of the forms of governing. It contains the ministerial authority of bishops (called *episkopé*), the synodal authority and, as the third, the primatial one.

In the relations between the Churches and Ecclesial Communities nowadays the problem of governing authority in the Church is still crucial. Within this, the most tangible problem seems still to be that of primacy, and of the Roman primacy first of all. This is also the case for the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue.

I. THE WORK OF THE ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC  
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION

After three years of dialogue and work the Preparatory Commission<sup>1</sup> published the *Malta Report*<sup>2</sup>, containing the list of topics necessary to discuss.

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission was established by *The Common Declaration by the Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury*. In: H. M a y e r, L. V i s h e r (ed.). *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*. New York –Geneva 1984 pp. 125-126.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Preparatory Commission, 1968. (The Malta*

One of the main problems the *Malta Report* recommended to the Commission for further study was “[...] the question of authority, its nature, exercise, and implications”<sup>3</sup> In 1969, The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was established. ARCIC completed the first phase of its work in 1981 publishing some statements on which agreement had been reached together with necessary elucidations in the form of *The Final Report*. Out of four declarations the Commission produced, two concerned the question of authority in the Church: *Authority in the Church I. The Venice Statement*<sup>4</sup> and *Authority in the Church II. The Windsor Statement*<sup>5</sup>

In the succeeding years the second Commission (ARCIC II) continued to work, undertaking other important matters. But the questions concerning the authority in the Church still waited to be explored more deeply and fully. Finally in 1999, the Commission published the third agreed statement on authority: *The Gift of Authority. Authority in the Church III*<sup>6</sup> Among many specific issues concerning authority in the Church, those concerning primacy occupy the unique place. As primacy, especially the primacy of the bishop of Rome, was one of the crucial problems in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations during the last five centuries.

## II. PRIMACY

### IN THE ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

Primacy means the priority of one episcopal see before other episcopal sees of the region. In the historical development the bishop who was *the first* in the region (gr. *prótos*; lat. *primus*; eng. *primate*) hold the title of *Metropolitan* or *Patriarch*.

In the Roman Catholic Church the title *primate* designed the bishop of the historically principal see of a country. Nowadays, with increasing importance

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*Report*). In: M a y e r, V i s h e r (ed.). *Growth in Agreement* pp. 120-125.

<sup>3</sup> *The Malta Report* 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Authority in the Church. A Statement on the Question of Authority, its Nature, Exercise and Implications Agreed by the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission*. London 1976.

<sup>5</sup> Text of this Declaration as well as the Elucidation in: *Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission, The Final Report, Windsor 1981*. London 1982.

<sup>6</sup> *The Gift of Authority. Authority in the Church III. An Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*. London 1999.

of Episcopal Conferences and their chosen presidents, the title of *primate* becomes purely honorary. Presidents of the Episcopal Conference exercise a type of primacy. The national or regional primate or the president of the Episcopal Conference as every other bishop in the Catholic Church is subject to the primacy of the bishop of Rome, the pope<sup>7</sup>

In the Anglican Communion the title as well as the function of a primate is connected with the bishop of the capital see of a Church province. Every Anglican province has practically full autonomy. There is no higher office of the primacy over Anglican primates. The Conference of Primates is only a consultative one, not a supreme body of the Anglican Communion. The Primate of England, archbishop of Canterbury, fulfils the service of primacy for whole the Anglican Communion. It is, however, the primacy of honour, not of jurisdiction<sup>8</sup>

In the context of the ecumenical dialogue primacy is commonly understood as the supreme ministry of oversight held by the bishop of Rome over every episcopal see, what means over the whole Church. Following expressions are in use to designate the primacy of the bishop of Rome: the roman primacy, the universal primacy, the primacy of the pope.

As the result of the historical development, the see of Rome came to a unique position<sup>9</sup> However its prominence is derived not from the historical role of Rome, but is associated with the death of Peter and Paul there<sup>10</sup> This argument is the base on which *The Venice Statement* admits that the universal primacy, needed for the *koinonía* of the whole Church, could still be exercised by the see of Rome. This see, states the document, is the only

which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such *episkope* [...]. It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy [...] should be held by that see<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici. Auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus*. AAS 75:1983 esp. can. 333.

<sup>8</sup> On the structures of authority in the Anglican Communion cf. J. R o s e n t h a l. *The Essential Guide to the Anglican Communion*. London 1998 pp. 1-42.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *The Venice Statement* 12; *The Windsor Statement* 6.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. P. G r e l o t. *Pierre et Paul fondateurs de la primauté romaine*. "Istina" 27:1982 pp. 225-268.

<sup>11</sup> *The Venice Statement* 23.

Besides the historical argument, of greater importance certainly is the doctrinal one, expounded in *The Elucidation*:

According to Christian doctrine the unity in truth of the Christian community demands visible expression. We agree that such visible expression is the will of God and that the maintenance of visible unity at the universal level includes the *episkope* of a universal primate. This is a doctrinal statement<sup>12</sup>

As we can see, the documents of dialogue point to the necessity of the universal primacy not for historical reasons (“simply because one has existed or been claimed”<sup>13</sup>), but seeking in it the fulfilment of God’s will for his Church.

Therefore, the general agreement on the existence of the universal primacy even when exercised by the bishop of Rome is not yet the end of the story. As the real crux lies in the mode of exercising this ministry. There remains the question: how should the papal primacy be exercised to be acceptable to both Anglicans and Catholics? Most of historical controversies, which the opposed Churches raised had to do not with the doctrinal base but with its interpretation followed by concrete mode of acting by the Roman bishops. *The Venice Statement* reminds us:

The theological interpretation of this primacy and the administrative structures through which it has been exercised have varied considerably through the centuries. Neither theory nor practice, however, has ever fully reflected these ideals. Sometimes functions assumed by the see of Rome were not necessarily linked to the primacy: sometimes the conduct of the occupant of this see has been unworthy of his office: sometimes the image of this office has been obscured by interpretations placed upon it: and sometimes external pressures have made its proper exercise almost impossible<sup>14</sup>

There is a great need to seek proper forms of exercising the primacy and we may consider that the Catholic Church is clearly concerned about it. In his encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* Pope John Paul II wrote:

I insistently pray the Holy Spirit to shine his light upon us, enlightening all the Pastors and theologians of our Churches, that we may seek – together, of course –

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<sup>12</sup> *The Elucidation* 8.

<sup>13</sup> *The Elucidation* 1.

<sup>14</sup> *The Venice Statement* 12.

the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned<sup>15</sup>

The restoration of the papacy in its forms from the time before the historical division of the Churches is one of the issues proposed in the ecumenical dialogues, especially by the Orthodox Churches. For Catholics this point of view is difficult to assimilate. How to erase all the second millennium? Was the development of catholic Christianity completely wrong and deprived of the assistance of the Holy Spirit? *The Windsor Statement* faces these questions when it considers that:

[...] from time to time Anglican theologians have affirmed that, in changed circumstances, it might be possible for the churches of the Anglican Communion to recognize the development of the Roman primacy as a gift of divine providence – in other words, as an effect of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church.<sup>16</sup>

This language may certainly be welcomed by the Catholic Church. On the other side, Anglicans warmly welcome assurance of *The Venice Statement* derived from the teaching of the First and the Second Vatican Councils that

communion with the bishop of Rome does not imply submission to an authority which would stifle the distinctive features of the local churches<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *That They May Be One (Ut Unum Sint) Encyclical of Pope John Paul II promulgated on May 25, 1995.* Vatican 1995 § 95.

<sup>16</sup> *The Windsor Statement* 13. Some Anglican theologians openly opt for the idea of the Roman primacy in the service of the universal Church: "I have come now to a position, where I truly believe that, within the bishop of Rome's ministry, there is a gift not only for the diocese of Rome but also for every other local church in the world. It is a gift that I believe is necessary. I no longer believe that the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome is merely a possible option, desirable but not necessary. I have come to the position that, if it is not necessary, then it is neither possible nor desirable. Papal primacy is not something that is an optional extra, perhaps a nice way of doing it, but a gift from God. I do not believe that I have been alone in my shifting opinions over recent decades" (J. B a y c r o f t. *An Emerging Ecumenical Consensus on Papal Primacy?* "Journal of Ecumenical Studies" 35:1998 No. 3-4 (Summer-Fall) p. 366). H. Marot (*L'autorité dans l'Église. Document anglican-catholique romain.* "Irénikon" 50:1977 p. 67) points that such a tendency existed between Anglican theologians already in the XVII century. A. Hanson (*The Agreed Statement on Authority: An Anglican Note.* "One in Christ" 13:1977 p. 185) emphasized that the participants of the Lambeth Conference 1968 were ready to accept some kind of papal primacy.

<sup>17</sup> *The Venice Statement* 12.

In this context it is easier to designate mutual relations between the universal primate and a local bishop as the head of his own diocese. Each bishop by nature exercises autonomous authority in his own Church. This important point is clearly explained in *The Windsor Statement*:

[...] the universal primate is not the source from which diocesan bishops derive their authority, nor does his authority undermine that of the metropolitan or diocesan bishop. Primacy is not an autocratic power over the Church but a service in and to the Church which is a communion in faith and charity of local churches<sup>18</sup>

This way of governing the Church conceived as “an autocratic power” is what the non-Catholic Churches are perhaps the most afraid of, keeping in mind some examples from the past. That is why in the voices of our separated brothers the claim can be heard that the authority of bishops in the Church should be exercised *cum Petro* but not *sub Petro* (*with Peter* but not *under Peter*). Roman primacy rightly understood implies the ministry of oversight exercised in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the Churches to Christ and one another<sup>19</sup> In this way the primacy is embodied in the collegial responsibility of all the bishops<sup>20</sup> To guarantee it, the authority of the pope needs to be balanced by the conciliar authority, as these two forms of authority are complementary and create together the ministry of *episkopé*<sup>21</sup>

### III. FRUITS OF THE DIALOGUE

*The Venice Statement*, describing the great concern of authority in the Church, formulates basic principles of primacy. The specific issues concerning primacy are developed in *The Windsor Statement*. The latest ARCIC document, *The Gift of Authority*, confirming and completing the theses of two

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<sup>18</sup> *The Windsor Statement* 19.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *The Venice Statement* 10-12; *Elucidation* 8; *The Windsor Statement* 18-22.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *The Venice Statement* 21; *The Windsor Statement* 19.

<sup>21</sup> Anglicans have always perceived the question of the authority in the Church in the categories of the right balance between various forms of authority. Cf. H. C h a d w i c h, E. J. Y a r n o l d. *Truth and Authority. A Commentary on the Agreed Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission: Authority in the Church. Venice 1976.* London 1977 p. 23.

previous statements shows some progress. It contains some concrete proposals which – in Commission's opinion – could be accepted by our Churches at the present stage of the dialogue. In this document the chapter concerning the universal primacy is entitled: *Universal Primacy: A Gift to be Shared*. Such formulation of the issue implies the possibility of mutual enriching and underlines the logic of the whole document, which places authority in the Church in all its forms in the categories of God's gift for his Church<sup>22</sup> The Commission do not hesitate to state:

The Commission's work has resulted in sufficient agreement on universal primacy as a gift to be shared, for us to propose that such a primacy could be offered and received even before our churches are in full communion<sup>23</sup>

Such ministry of the universal primacy exercised for our two Churches, perceived in the context of synodality and conciliarity, could be helpful in maintaining the legitimate diversity of traditions and in promoting the common good. Moreover, the primacy in this style could offer the unique ministry of teaching, particularly in difficult theological and moral issues<sup>24</sup>

We may admit that such a proposal risks to be astonishing equally for the hierarchy and for the faithful of our Churches. However it confirms the high level of consensus in the matter of authority reached by ARCIC. Acceptance of this proposal would confirm two particular conclusions the Commission have reached:

- that Anglicans be open to and desire a recovery and re-reception under certain clear conditions of the exercise of universal primacy by the Bishop of Rome;
- that Roman Catholics be open to and desire a re-reception of the exercise of primacy by the Bishop of Rome and the offering of such a ministry to the whole Church of God<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> „God's gift of authority to his Church is at the service of God's 'Yes' to his people and their 'Amen'” (*The Gift of Authority. Preface*).

<sup>23</sup> *The Gift of Authority* 60.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 61.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 62.

## CONCLUSION

As we can see in this brief summary of the ARCIC work on the authority and especially the primacy in the Church, patient and persistent dialogue is capable of eliminating doctrinal controversies even in such delicate questions as the primacy. To reach that achievement the Commission had to abandon the exclusive language of past polemics and accept new language of openness and mutual understanding.

The life of our two – still separated – Churches will show how the doctrinal statements on authority in the Church could be fruitful for the achievement of full, visible unity.

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## „DAR, KTÓRY MA BYĆ WSPÓLNIE DZIELONY”

ANGLIKANIE I KATOLICY NA TEMAT PRYMATU UNIWERSALNEGO:  
UZGODNIENIA ARCIC

## S t r e s z c z e n i e

W toczącym się od wielu lat dialogu anglikańsko-rzymskokatolickim poczesne miejsce zajmuje kwestia autorytetu w Kościele. Wśród całego zbioru zagadnień wchodzących w skład tej kwestii najbardziej kontrowersyjnym jest problem prymatu uniwersalnego. Międzynarodowa Komisja Anglikańsko-Rzymskokatolicka (ARCIC) opublikowała trzy dokumenty na temat autorytetu w Kościele, w których sukcesywnie starała się pogłębiać wspólne rozumienie zagadnień związanych z autorytetem źródeł nauczania jak i form rządzenia w Kościele. W dokumentach ARCIC szczegółowego opracowania doczekał się problem prymatu uniwersalnego.

Po osiągnięciu konsensusu dotyczącego potrzeby istnienia w Kościele prymatu uniwersalnego Komisja podjęła trud uzgodnienia, jakie formy powinno przybrać sprawowanie prymatu powszechnego, aby były możliwe do zaakceptowania zarówno przez katolików, jak i anglikanów. Opublikowane rezultaty uzgodnień przekroczyły najśmielsze oczekiwania. Komisja stwierdza, że prymat uniwersalny jest wolą Bożą i jako taki ma do odegrania szczególną rolę w chrześcijaństwie. Anglikanie są gotowi przyjąć, że w sytuacji ewentualnego zjednoczenia Kościołów posługa prymatu uniwersalnego sprawowana byłaby przez biskupa Rzymu. Jednakże autorytet prymacjalny musiałby być równoważony przez synodalne i koncyliarne formy sprawowania autorytetu w Kościele. Co więcej, sprawujący prymat uniwersalny mógłby w pewnych okolicznościach zabierać głos w imieniu całego Kościoła. Wypełniając swój urząd nauczania, w wierności Ewangelii i po zasięgnięciu opinii swych braci w biskupstwie, mógłby wydawać wiążące chrześcijan orzeczenia w sprawach wiary i moralności.

Ostatni dokument ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority* („Dar Autorytetu”), określa autorytet w Kościele jako „dar, który ma być wspólnie dzielony” Komisja nie waha się stwierdzić, że wypracowane przez nią uzgodnienia odnośnie do prymatu powszechnego pozwalają na wysunięcie konkretnej propozycji: prymat uniwersalny mógłby być ofiarowany i przyjęty nawet przed osiągnięciem przez nasze Kościoły pełnej komunii. Posługa prymatu, sprawowana w obu Kościołach, postrzegana przez nie w kontekście synodalności i koncyliarności, mogłaby się stać pomocna w utrzymaniu uprawnionej różnorodności tradycji i promowaniu dobra wspólnego. Co więcej, tak rozumiany prymat miałby do zaoferowania jedyną w swym rodzaju posługę nauczania w kwestiach teologicznych i moralnych.

*Streścił ks. Przemysław Kantyka*

**Słowa kluczowe:** dialog ekumeniczny, Międzynarodowa Komisja Anglikańsko-Rzymskokatolicka (ARCIC), prymat.

**Key words:** ecumenical dialogue, Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), primacy.